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HISTORY OF THE WORLD CUP

INCLUDES THE 2023 WOMEN'S WORLD CUP

• MEMORABLE MOMENTS AND ICONIC PLAYERS FROM THE WORLD'S GREATEST SHOW •

Digital Edition

FUTURE

SECOND EDITION



SPAIN 1982



MEXICO 1970



WEST GERMANY 1974


PEDRI
MODRIĆ

WELCOME

When it comes to sport, football's World Cup is without doubt the greatest show on Earth. Featuring the very best teams from all corners of the globe, it's a month-long festival of football that guarantees incredible drama, great goals, star players and more, as the world's nations battle it out to be crowned champions.

In History of the World Cup, we look back at every World Cup, from the inaugural competition in Uruguay in 1930 right up to the most recent edition of the men's tournament in Qatar in 2022.

From Pelé's arrival in 1958 and the mesmerising Brazil team of 1970 to England's heroes of '66, Holland's 'Total Football' and Lionel Messi's incredible performance in Qatar, we relive the memorable moments, iconic players and legendary teams from throughout the history of the most famous sporting event on the planet. We also celebrate the tournament's individual greats and World Cup icons, including Ronaldo, Bobby Moore and Franz Beckenbauer, and get fascinating insight in interviews with the likes of Pelé and Paolo Rossi.

We also run down the highs and lows of the recent 2023 Women's World Cup in Australia and New Zealand, as well as bringing you a brief history of the women's tournament. Enjoy!



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THE GREATEST SHOW ON EARTH...

WITH THE 22ND STAGING OF THE WORLD CUP FINALS NOW BEHIND US, LET'S REMEMBER HOW FAR THE TOURNAMENT HAS COME, FROM ITS WINTRY START IN MONTEVIDEO IN 1930 TO THE SPECTACLE OF QATAR IN 2022.



December 18, 2022, Qatar. Lionel Messi and the Argentina team celebrate after beating France on penalties to win their country's first World Cup since 1986.



June 16, 2022, New York. The World Cup will head to North America in 2026, with 16 cities across Canada, Mexico and the United States chosen to host the 23rd edition of the FIFA World Cup.

The brainchild of former FIFA president Jules Rimet, it's safe to say that the FIFA World Cup has come a long way since it began in Uruguay back in 1930. Then, just 13 national teams took part in the fledgling competition, with just four European teams making the long and expensive trip across the Atlantic Ocean to South America, personally persuaded by Rimet himself that this was the start of something genuinely special.

Fast forward eight decades and the World Cup Finals is now the biggest sporting spectacle in the calendar, pulling together nations from almost every country in the world to celebrate, enjoy and revel in a festival of football that is both compelling and unique.

A true world sport

The numbers are simply staggering. Today, over 200 nations around the world enter the qualifying competition (more than are members of the United Nations) while, at the World Cup Finals in South Africa in 2010, around half of the world's population, some 3.2 billion people, watched the tournament on television. Billions of dollars are paid to FIFA for the privilege of sponsoring the event or to bag the broadcasting rights while the host countries can expect a sizeable fillip to their economy for the four weeks that the World Cup takes place.

Today, the FIFA World Cup Finals is a competition that seems to know no boundaries but, that said, it has been a rocky road to get to where we are. But this is a stubborn and indefatigable beast, a competition that has survived everything from catastrophic natural disasters to heavy-handed political interference, from financial crises to two World Wars.

More than that, though, it has not simply survived, it has prospered, growing in stature and popularity as the planet took the game to its heart and, in turn, the World Cup itself.

HARDLY A SINGLE NATION ISN'T TOUCHED BY THE TOURNAMENT.

Truly, it is a sporting event unlike any other. A competition without compare. Yes, the FIFA World Cup Finals is where heroes (and occasionally villains) are made and where legends are created. It's the event where a moment of individual inspiration or a flash of genius can not merely transform a team's fortunes but change a player's career and life overnight, and a cursory examination of some of the players who have dominated this tournament, etching their names into the annals of the game's history, reads like a *Who's Who* of international football.

From Pelé's record-breaking three wins as a player to Franz Beckenbauer's victories as player and then coach, from Diego Maradona's genius that enraptured the world in 1986 to Zinedine Zidane's incomparable skill in 1998 and 2006, these are the kind of celebrated players that the World Cup Finals has a unique knack of producing, the kind of players who always seem to rise to this most lofty of occasions.

New horizons

With Russia hosting a memorable edition in 2018 and Qatar becoming the first Middle Eastern nation to host the tournament in 2022, attention will turn to North America in 2026, with Mexico, Canada and the United States taking the baton.

It's proof that the enduring appeal and ever-increasing popularity of the event now stretches to all four corners of the globe. Today, moreover, no nation, anywhere, ever needs an invitation to take part either.

Over the coming pages we will chart the story of this unique sporting competition, from its humble and uncertain beginnings on through periods of flagging interest and tit-for-tat boycotts and on to the golden age of the competition, where now hardly a single nation isn't touched by the tournament.

It's quite a story.



December 18, 2022, Qatar. Messi follows in the footsteps of Argentina's favourite son, Diego Maradona.



URUGUAY 1930

FOOTBALL'S FIRST OFFICIAL WORLD CHAMPIONS, URUGUAY – ALSO GOLD MEDALLISTS AT THE 1924 AND 1928 OLYMPICS – PROVIDED ENTERTAINMENT BOTH ON AND OFF THE PITCH AS THE FIFA WORLD CUP WAS BORN.

Souvenir poster.

It was on the snow-topped pitch of the Estadio Pocito in Montevideo, before a modest crowd of 3,000, that France's Lucien Laurent volleyed in the first ever goal in World Cup history. Meeting a cross from winger Ernest Libérati in the 19th minute of France's opening game against Mexico on July 13, 1930, the inside-right etched his name into footballing folklore, and celebrated with a mere handshake as he trotted back to the restart.

Though the 22-year-old could not have known then of the significance of his right-footed strike, his muted celebrations were symbolic of a time when football was a world apart from the high-profile, professional and commercially-driven game we know today.

In comparison, it's easy to view the inaugural World Cup as one of haphazard organisation, political bickering and incompetent officiating. But football's historians will instead laud the mere fact that it went ahead and produced FIFA's first ever official world champions, therefore giving birth to the quadrennial showstopper enjoyed by billions of fans across the planet today.

The nationality of the opening scorer proved particularly apt, given that the game's governing body, Fédération Internationale de Football Association, was formed in Paris in 1904. FIFA had declared then that they alone had the right to stage an international championship, but were initially satisfied organising the football tournament held at each Summer Olympics, at the time considered the world championship for amateurs.

But when they clashed with the International Olympic Committee over the status of amateur players (a contentious topic that would continue to plague the sport's infant years), football was removed from the schedule for the 1932 Olympics in Los Angeles.

Association football was left in desperate need for an international showpiece, and another Frenchman, FIFA president Jules Rimet, was the man to provide it. On May 26, 1928, at FIFA's Amsterdam conference, the World Cup was conceived.

Europe or elsewhere?

Rimet's first task was to decide on the hosts, and he wasn't short of contenders. Europe's best were keen, with Italy, Sweden, Spain, Hungary and the Netherlands all lodging bids, while Uruguay offered the sole option from South America. The Uruguayans were the reigning Olympic champions, having


July 30, 1930, Montevideo. The official attendance at Estadio Centenario for the World Cup Final was 68,346, but more likely 93,000.

defeated Argentina 2-1 in Amsterdam's Olympic Stadium in a replay (the first match finished 1-1). They also planned to build a new £200,000, 90,000 capacity national stadium to celebrate 100 years of independence and, crucially, offered to pay the expenses of all participants.

In a time before transatlantic air travel and when many countries were struggling in the face of a global economic recession, this was a bold and generous offer that their rivals were unable to match. As the Europeans withdrew, Uruguay was chosen at a FIFA congress in Barcelona in 1929.

Qualifying was not required as each FIFA-affiliated nation was invited. Despite boasting professional domestic leagues in Britain, invitations were not extended to the home nations, who had rescinded their membership of FIFA in yet another row over payments to amateur players. A handful of British players would nevertheless still manage an appearance in Uruguay, with six American-based Brits donning the white shirt of the USA instead, where professional soccer was also being played.

By invitation

Alongside the United States, plenty of interest was shown by other nations in the Americas. Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Chile, Mexico, Paraguay and Peru all entered, but FIFA had no such luck when it came to enticing their European counterparts. Austria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Italy boasted some of Europe's finest footballing talent at the time, but could not be persuaded to make the long journey. With two months to go, a tournament that was meant to represent the world was looking distinctly lopsided.

THE WORLD CUP PROVED AN ADVENTURE TOO GOOD TO TURN DOWN FOR MOST OF THE YOUNG FOOTBALLERS, EAGER AT THE CHANCE TO EMBARK ON A THRILLING FIRST-TIME VOYAGE ACROSS THE GLOBE.

Rimet persevered, and eventually found four European sides willing to test their sea legs. Remarkably, Romania's newly crowned King Carol II was so keen to send a side that he personally selected the squad, who only agreed to go following a royal guarantee that they would all be re-employed on their return. Similar concessions were needed before players from Belgium, Yugoslavia and France would make the trip.

In an example of the sacrifices they were expected to make, France's opening scorer, Laurent, was only permitted time off from the Peugeot factory in which he worked if he agreed to forsake his pay while absent. Sochaux, where Laurent played, were, at the time, Peugeot's own works side.

All aboard

Despite being a daunting financial decision, it proved an adventure too good to turn down for most of the young footballers, eager at the chance to embark on a thrilling first-time voyage across the globe.

Enjoying daily training sessions on deck, their floating home for two weeks was the SS *Conte Verde*, a Scottish-built 18,000-tonne Italian ocean liner. The Romanians were the first to board, in Genoa on June 21, 1930. Two weeks later, having picked up the French, Belgians, Brazilians, three European officials and Jules Rimet himself, the *Conte Verde* arrived to 10,000 welcoming Uruguayans in Montevideo on July 4.

The cheering masses also got their first glimpse of "The Goddess of Victory", the 30cm high, four-kilogram statuette brought over by the FIFA president it would eventually be named after. Fifty-three years later, the Jules Rimet Trophy would be stolen from Brazil's football headquarters in Rio and never seen again, believed to have been melted down for its gold.

A similar dark fate befell the boat on which the trophy arrived into Montevideo.

Thirteen years after its crucial role in the maiden World Cup, the *Conte Verde* would be scuttled by its own Italian navy in Shanghai in 1943 to prevent seizure by the Japanese. The occupying forces nevertheless managed to refloat her before she was sunk again, this time in 1945 at the hands of a US Air Force B-24 Liberator bomber. However, the ship was made good and became a Japanese troopship.

Back in Montevideo, the Yugoslavians arrived separately on the mail steamship *Florida*, completing the 13-team line-up. Only then did FIFA make the official draw. As top seeds, Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay and USA were kept apart as four groups were drawn, Group 1 containing four teams and the rest three. Two points were awarded for victory, one for a draw, with the top side in each group progressing to the Semi-Finals.

Montevideo takes centre stage

After two years in the making, the teams had arrived, the groups had been drawn and the tournament could begin. But not everything was ready. Heavy rain had delayed construction on the new national stadium, meaning that the hosts were forced to wait five days before they could begin their campaign. Instead, with Uruguay's capital Montevideo hosting the entire tournament, secondary venues Estadio Grand Parque Central and Estadio Pocitos shared the opening matches.

Signs that not everything was running smoothly were evident on the pitch too. While the French enjoyed a 4-1 opening victory, their following match against Argentina provided the tournament's first real controversy. With France 1-0 down and on the attack, Brazilian referee Gilmedo de Almeida Rêgo blew the full-time whistle, despite there being six minutes left on the clock.

A partisan home crowd would not let their fiercest rivals off so easily, and amid furious protests from the stands, Rêgo was forced to recall the players to the pitch, some of whom were already in the bath. An understandably befuddled French side were unable to grab an equaliser upon their return, and Luis Monti's 81st minute goal proved the winner.

France may have played two games in the tournament's first three days, but many of the other sides had yet to begin. Alongside them in Group 1, Chile registered a comfortable 3-0 win over Mexico courtesy of two goals from forward Carlos Vidal and an own goal from Manuel Rosas. Although Mexico would complete a thoroughly miserable campaign with a 6-3 loss to Argentina, Rosas was able to make a more positive mark on the tournament by scoring the World Cup's first ever penalty. The spot kick was awarded by Bolivian ref Ulises Saucedo, who combined his role as referee at the tournament with the small matter of managing his national side.

Argentina had been too strong for the Mexicans, with striker Guillermo Stábille in particular catching the eye with a fine hat-trick. The 25-year-old Hurácan striker wasn't picked



July 30, 1930, Montevideo. Members of the Uruguayan team celebrate at the Estadio Centenario after winning the first World Cup competition, coming from behind to beat rivals Argentina 4-2.



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LCO FOOTBALL MONTEVIDEO.

WE EXTEND OUR SINCERE CONGRATULATIONS TO YOUR TEAM ON ITS WONDERFUL VICTORY AND FOR THE COMPLETE SUCCESS OF THE GREAT VENTURE UNDERTAKEN BY YOUR ASSOCIATION STOP WITH EXPRESSIONS OF PROFOUND ESTEEM.

SOCCER NEWYORK.

A cable message dated 31 July, 1930 from the US Soccer Federation to the Uruguayan FA, sending congratulations after Uruguay became the first world champions. The US finished third.

for the opening victory over France and only received his call up to the first XI when skipper Manuel Ferreira opted to return home to take a law exam.

After Chile's 1-0 victory over France, qualification went to the wire between Group 1's two South American sides. Once again Stábille was troubling the scoresheet, bagging a brace inside 15 minutes as the increasingly impressive Argentinians prevailed 3-1. The game was played in the new Estadio Centenario, five days after hosting its inaugural match, when Uruguay defeated Peru in front of 70,000 people. It may have been five days late in finishing, but Uruguayan architect Juan Antonio Scasso had delivered the largest stadium outside the British Isles, all built in under a year. It was a phenomenal feat of construction and the iconic stadium remains the proud home of La Celeste – as the Uruguay national side is known – to this day.

It was by no means a vintage opening performance from the hosts, with Héctor Castro's 65th minute goal the only difference between the sides, but it was enough to entice 10,000 extra fans to see a much more emphatic 4-0 victory over Romania to confirm a Semi-Final spot.

Upsets and gestures

The first shock of the World Cup came in Group 2, when the unfancied Yugoslavians defeated seeded Brazil 2-1 in their opening game before seeing off Bolivia to progress. Having never recorded an international victory, the Bolivians at least ensured they would be remembered for reasons other than their footballing skills when they wore shirts emblazoned with single letters that spelt "Viva Uruguay" as the players lined up before their opening game. Endearing as their savvy public relations stunt was, sadly for their referee-cum-coach the hearts of the locals was all they would win as Bolivia recorded two 4-0 losses before crashing out.

In Group 3, Peru fared little better. Not only did they lose both games, to Romania and group winners Uruguay, but in Plácido Galindo they had the first player to be sent off at a World Cup.

Knockout stuff

In the first Semi-Final, between Argentina and USA, torrential rain matched tempestuous feelings on the pitch, as the Americans lost midfielder Raphael Tracey to a broken leg after just ten minutes (he played on till half time). In a World Cup slowly becoming famous for farce, the oncoming US physio tripped, breaking his bottle of chloroform in the process. The resulting fumes knocked him unconscious and he was carried off the field by the bemused players.

Despite only trailing by a single Luis Monti goal at half time, the depleted Americans were unable to withstand the power and pace of the Argentinian forward line in the second half, as two each for River Plate winger Carlos Peucelle and the ever-potent Stábile, after Alejandro Scopelli had doubled Argentina's lead, saw them into the Final. A last minute consolation strike from Kilmarnock-born Jim Brown would be the USA's last significant mark on the first World Cup.

The following day, 79,000 turned up to watch a plucky Yugoslavian team face up to the confident hosts. Six years earlier at the 1924 Olympics, Uruguay had been ruthless in a 7-0 First Round demolishing of the same opponents in Paris.

The visitors must have thought revenge was on the cards when they took a shock fourth-minute lead through Dorde Vujadinovic. Instead, it only inspired the home side to another rout. Three goals before half time – including a contentious second said to have been "assisted" by a policeman returning the ball into play – put the tournament favourites in control, before three more in the second half, including a hat-trick from Pedro Cea, finished the job emphatically: 6-1.

The finest teams in the world

Despite the controversies and at times bungling organisation, there was little doubt that the tournament's two best sides had made it to the Final. Just as at the Olympic Final in Amsterdam two years earlier, Argentina would play Uruguay. Argentina had scored 16 goals from their four games; Uruguay had notched 11 from just three. FIFA and Jules Rimet were hoping for a spectacle, and these free-scoring sides were not likely to disappoint.

With the now-traditional Third-Place Play-Off not established until 1934, there would be a three-day break before the Final, allowing plenty of time for an estimated 30,000 Argentinians to make the short crossing over the River Plate.

A scarcity of available boats meant not all would make kick-off. Chants of "*Victoria o muerte*" could be heard from those that did make it across, as tensions ran high between the South American neighbours. Supporters were even searched for firearms upon entry, and the ground was heaving with 93,000 spectators three hours before kick-off.

A CONTENTIOUS SECOND GOAL WAS SAID TO HAVE BEEN "ASSISTED" BY A POLICEMAN.

Death threats had been received by Argentina's Luis Monti, but the in-form midfielder insisted on playing. Meanwhile, Belgian referee John Langenus, one of the officials to arrive on the SS *Conte Verde*, only agreed to take charge of the game on the assurance that a boat would be waiting for him at the harbour should he need to make a quick post-match exit.

His first task was to settle a pre-match disagreement over the match ball, as both teams insisted on using their own. Eventually, FIFA intervened with a compromise – the Argentinians' ball would be used for the first half, while Uruguay would get their turn after the interval. Whether psychological or

otherwise, the decision appeared to influence the outcome. Despite taking a 12th minute lead through Pablo Dorado, the Uruguayans went in at half time 2-1 down, following Peucelle's 20th minute equaliser and another strike from eight-goal Golden Boot winner Stábile just before the break.

Lucky ball

A change of ball saw a change of fortunes for the home side. Monti missed a crucial chance to silence his tormentors early in the second half, and when Cea equalised just moments later in the 57th minute, the fanatical crowd sensed a momentum shift.

Left winger Santos Iriarte, an ever-present throughout for Uruguay, scored his second of the tournament ten minutes later, before the finishing touch was added by an unlikely hero. Despite having scored three goals in the tournament, including two in the Semi-Final, striker Juan Anselmo had been left out of the team in favour of Héctor Castro, the Nacional forward who had earlier in the tournament scored the first ever goal at the new stadium. Nicknamed "El Manco" ("one-armed") due to a childhood accident that robbed him of his right forearm, his 89th minute strike justified his inclusion and sealed the victory as the jubilant Estadio Centenario crowd celebrated wildly.

It wasn't just the fans showing emotion. The players shed tears while skipper José Nasazzi, who had superbly marshalled a defence that had conceded only three goals, gratefully received the World Cup trophy from Jules Rimet to became the first captain to lift football's most prestigious prize.

Uruguay president Juan Campisteguy declared the following day – July 31, 1930 – a national holiday, while contrasting scenes in Buenos Aires saw the Uruguayan consulate pelted with stones by disgruntled Albiceleste fans.

Meanwhile, Jules Rimet prepared for the long trip home, satisfied at seeing his two years of hard, often frustrating, work come to fruition. The world was hooked, and he was already looking to 1934. But, beginning with an unfinished stadium and ending with a one-armed match winner, whatever was to happen in the following years, he must surely have known that there would never be a World Cup quite like the first.



July 30, 1930, Montevideo. Jules Rimet (left), president of FIFA, presents the World Cup trophy (known from 1946 as the Jules Rimet Trophy) to Paul Jude, president of the Uruguay Football Association.

ITALY 1934

AS THE BLACK CLOUDS OF FASCISM GATHERED OVER EUROPE, FOR ITALIAN DICTATOR BENITO MUSSOLINI HOSTING – AND WINNING – THE WORLD CUP WOULD PRESENT HIS GRAND VISION ON A GLOBAL STAGE.

As the Italian players emerged from the tunnel, a flag bearer held high *il Tricolore*, waving it in front of 50,000 expectant fans in Rome's Stadio Nazionale PNF – the ground of Italy's National Fascist Party. With kick-off minutes away, Italy's players faced the main stand and raised their right arms to salute their leader, Benito Mussolini. The hosts, superbly organised under disciplinarian coach Vittorio Pozzo, had reached the World Cup Final and *Il Duce* was 90 minutes away from seeing his political masterplan realised.

From the moment that Italy were named as hosts of the second FIFA World Cup Finals, Mussolini had set his sights on using the tournament as a platform to promote his fascist regime. He knew the eyes of the world would be on his nation, and an Italian win would send the perfect message reverberating around the world. Indeed, it was deemed such an effective propaganda tool that Adolf Hitler would also employ the same methods two years later when Berlin hosted the Olympic Games.

MUSSOLINI HAD SET HIS SIGHTS ON USING THE TOURNAMENT AS A PLATFORM TO PROMOTE HIS FASCIST REGIME.

Following the success of the first World Cup in Uruguay, Italy had pulled out all the stops to ensure the tournament would arrive on their soil. FIFA had already favoured a change of continent, with president Jules Rimet keen to persuade more European sides to take part, especially as only four had endeavoured to make the 7,000-mile sea journey to Montevideo, with the Italians one of the many heavyweight nations deciding to give the competition a wide berth.

Large-scale thinking

Sweden were Italy's only rival bidders, and they soon withdrew once they realised the grand scale and ambitious nature of the Italian proposal. Like Uruguay four years earlier, Italy had offered to cover all of the expenses of the teams taking part and rather than hosting the tournament in one city, Italy's World Cup would be a more expansive affair, encompassing eight host cities, from Turin to Naples, Rome to Trieste.

It would be an idea and template that would endure long beyond 1934.



Official poster.



The commentary box.

The grandeur of Italy's pitch appealed. In stark contrast to 1930, when FIFA struggled to scrape 13 teams together, 32 nations applied to be a part of this burgeoning football spectacle. Only 16 places had been allocated for the Finals, forcing FIFA to devise the first ever preliminary qualifying rounds.

JUST AS IN 1930, THE BRITISH NATIONS DECLINED TO PARTICIPATE, SUGGESTING THAT THEIR OWN HOME CHAMPIONSHIPS TO BE OF FAR MORE IMPORTANCE.

Though future tournaments would include an automatic place for the host nation, Italy were not afforded such a luxury this time around. In that respect, they remain the only World Cup hosts in history required to actually qualify for their own tournament. Not that it proved anything like a problem for Pozzo's men. Their 4-0 victory over Greece at the San Siro was so comprehensive that the Greeks decided to withdraw before the second leg, saving the Azzurri a trip to Athens.

In total, 12 European teams would qualify, including Belgium, France and Romania – three of the four sides who had braved the two-week transatlantic journey four years earlier. The fourth side to join them in Uruguay would not be adding a second notch to their World Cup history, however, as the surprise Semi-Finalist from 1930, Yugoslavia, propped up their group behind the Romanians and newcomers Switzerland.

Other notable debutants in 1934 included the Netherlands, Hungary, Germany and the much-fancied Austrian and Czechoslovakian sides. Austria in particular were seen among the pre-tournament favourites for the title. Under coach Hugo Meisl, they had enjoyed a 14-match unbeaten run in the early 1930s, defeating most of their big European rivals along the way and becoming the first European side to beat Scotland as well.

In captain Matthias Sindelar, nicknamed "Der Papierene" ("the Paper Man") for his waif-like build and agility, they boasted one of the continent's finest dribblers. Only three months before the World Cup, they sent out the strongest possible message by defeating the Italians 4-2 in Turin.

Champions stay at home

In South America, meanwhile, withdrawals from Peru and Chile meant that Argentina and Brazil qualified automatically, though both would send weakened sides. In one of football's greatest ever sulks, reigning champions Uruguay refused to send any of their players, second string or otherwise. Continuing to hold a grudge against the European nations who had failed to make the effort to appear at their inaugural World Cup, the champions had chosen to stay at home in protest.

But there remained an air of stubbornness closer to home, too. Just as in 1930, the British nations declined to participate, continuing their self-imposed exile from FIFA. Unwilling to allow their professional players to compete alongside amateur counterparts, the respective football associations also demonstrated an incredible lack of foresight in suggesting that their own Home Championship to be of far more importance than the World Cup.

The Irish Free State team were keen to participate, but were edged out in qualifying on goal average, with Belgium having

conceded one goal less against group winners the Netherlands. Notably, Aberdeen's Paddy Moore scored four for the Irish Free State in a 4-4 draw in Dublin against Belgium.

Mexico good-bye wave

Africa would also have its first representative, as Egypt saw off Mandatory Palestine – a Jewish team – over two legs, while Mexico had seemed certain to complete the line-up after beating Cuba before a late entry from USA left them requiring a play-off against the 1930 Semi-Finalists. Peculiarly, despite sharing a border, the two nations would play their qualifier in Rome only three days before the tournament began. The US prevailed 4-2, leaving the Mexicans facing the prospect of a tortuous 30-day return journey without having even played a single World Cup Finals match.

Not that it would take their neighbouring conquerors long to join them. FIFA's decision to scrap the group stages from 1930 in favour of a ruthless knockout format left nothing to chance. The US must have sensed their luck was running out when they drew Italy, and a 7-1 rout confirmed the mismatch. Bologna forward Angelo Schiavio scored Italy's opening goal before completing a hat-trick, while Raimundo "Mumo" Orsi scored two.

Orsi was one of several *oriundi* – Argentinian-born but of Italian ancestry – who had opted to switch their national allegiances. Another was the man who captained Argentina in the 1930 World Cup Final, the robust centre-half Luis Monti. In fact, the majority of Argentina's stars from Uruguay had made the move to Europe, including their top scorer Guillermo Stábile, meaning that coach Felipe Pascucci was not able to name a single 1930 Finalist in his squad. Despite being seeded, the depleted Albiceleste were also First Round victims, as Sweden twice came from behind to win 3-2, thanks to two goals from Sven Jonasson and a 79th minute winner from Knut Kroon.

Completing a miserable tournament for the Americas, fellow seeds Brazil were also shocked, as Spain scored three times in the opening half hour in a 3-1 win. Although they too would exit, Egypt were far from disgraced in a 4-2 loss to a strong Hungarian side. Two goals down down within the first half hour, two strikes from Abdulrahman Fawzi brought the Africans level at the break and Fawzi was controversially denied a hat-trick following a dubious offside call by Italian referee Rinaldo Barlassina, before the Hungarians struck twice again. Despite a promising debut, the Egyptians would be forced to wait another 56 years for their next Finals appearance, coinciding with the World Cup's return to Italy in 1990.

European strength

Elsewhere, Germany began their campaign with an impressive 5-2 win over Belgium, Czechoslovakia recovered from going 1-0 down in the 11th minute to beat Romania 2-1, while two goals from Leopold Keilholz inspired Switzerland to a 3-2 win over the Netherlands. In arguably the match of the round, Austria's much-lauded "Wunderteam" needed extra time in Turin to defeat France 3-2.

For the only time in World Cup history, Europe boasted all eight sides in the Quarter-Finals, and all after only one day's play. Way before television scheduling and myriad commercial concerns preoccupied organising committees, all eight First Round matches had kicked off on the same day, at exactly the same time; 4.30pm on Sunday, May 27.

Following their commanding opening win against the States, the Italians found the Spanish a much more difficult proposition in Florence. In a bruising encounter typified by Monti's crunching tackles in defence, the Spanish held the hosts to a 1-1 draw after extra time. A replay was required,


The Argentina players make a spectacle while training.

taking place the very next day. A Spain side now missing key players through injury, including their unflappable keeper Ricardo Zamora, were eventually defeated by a solitary goal from Giuseppe Meazza, the Internazionale hero so revered in Milan that 46 years later they would rename the San Siro in his honour. The Italians had progressed, but not for the first time in the tournament, neutrals were muttering about some questionable refereeing in favour of the home side.

No love lost

Fifty miles north in Bologna's Stadio Littoriale, 25,000 watched as Austria progressed at the expense of old rivals Hungary, though the 2-1 scoreline suggested a much tighter affair than the 5-2 demolishing Meisl's side had handed out only the previous month in a friendly in Vienna. The Hungarians had attempted to upset their opponents' famous passing game with robust tactics that eventually saw the sending off of Hungary's Imre Markos following a mass brawl.

Preparing his side for their third game in four days, Italian coach Vittorio Pozzo took inspiration from the Hungarians' display and sought to similarly shackle the Austrians in a Semi-Final head-to-head that many saw as the Final in all but name.

It was no surprise when Monti was given the job of keeping Matthias Sindelar quiet, while the heavy conditions on a sodden San Siro pitch did no favours for the skilful Austrians. Sixty thousand would brave the rain to see Italy squeeze out another 1-0 victory, thanks to another of Pozzo's *oriundi*, inside-forward Enrique Guaita. For all their brute force, the Italians' fitness levels were a credit to their manager's strict and exacting regime. Nicknamed "*Il Vecchio Maestro*", the Old Master had cleverly steered Italy into the final.

Czechs march on

Back in the national stadium, Czechoslovakia took on the Germans. In the Quarter-Finals, two goals in three second-half minutes for German striker Karl Hohmann had ended Sweden's commendable run, while Sparta Prague's Oldrich Nejedly proved to be the match winner for the Czechoslovakians, scoring with just eight minutes to go as the Swiss finished on the wrong end of an entertaining five-goal thriller.

In the Semi-Finals, Nejedly, who would be named in FIFA's team of the tournament, was again the hero for Karel Petru's side. Opening the scoring on 19 minutes, he added two more to his tally in the last 20 minutes to complete a hat-trick, settling his side's nerves after Germany had hit back through Rudolf Noack.

As the referee blew the full-time whistle with the score at 3-1, the FIFA World Cup had its first all-European final and Czechoslovakia would be the side tasked with ruining Mussolini's party.

Both teams would have a week to recover and prepare. First, though, FIFA debuted a



June 10, 1934, Rome. The Stadio Nazionale PNF on World Cup Final day.

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LE GRANDI VITTORIE DEGLI ATLETI FASCISTI NEL NOME E PER IL PREMIO DEL DUCE

Gli azzurri conquistano alla presenza di Mussolini il Campionato del Mondo
Learco Guerra inscrive il proprio nome sul libro d'oro del Giro d'Italia

La volontà e il gioco irresistibile dei calciatori italiani

sono stati i coefficienti decisivi della vittoria azzurra che ha coronato nei due tempi supplementari la partita di tutte le emozioni

Italia-Cecoslovacchia: 2-1 (0-0, 1-1, 1-0 0-0)

(Puc, *Orsi*, *Schiavio*)

Soldati dello Sport

ROMA, 10 giugno.

Fino a quel momento la partita è di colore grigio. Aspra è la volontà di lottare nel cuore degli atleti, ma le due squadre, a furia di contendersi il terreno palmo a palmo, hanno finito per irrigidirsi in un gioco uniforme, per impaniarsi in una gara tutta nervi e niente fantasia. Fino a quel momento è la partita di chi ha paura di perdere, più che la partita di chi ha la smania di vincere; gli avversari si temono, la tattica è guardinga, i due portieri passano lunghi minuti inoperosamente: potrebbero agganciare un'amaca ai pali delle porte rispettive, e dormirci su.

D'un tratto la comune partita di calcio si trasforma in una tenzone guerriera. Alza verticalmente i suoi toni, scatena nelle squadre scariche elettriche, diffonde nella moltitudine un'ondata di passione. Diventa, per l'incantesimo d'un episodio di gioco, la vera, l'autentica finalissima del campionato del mondo. E' quando Puc, al 25', prima che la gara si concluda, sorprende Combi con un tiro violento ed insidioso e slancia la sua squadra in vantaggio. Mancano venti minuti al fischio dell'epilogo. E' come se una mazzata abbia percosso gli azzurri. Venti minuti, e la squadra boema non si raggomitola in difesa, ma sparpaglia le azioni allo scopo di guadagnar tempo, ma si butta nuovamente all'assalto. Fremono le minuscole bandierine bianco-rosse che impugnano gli sportivi venuti da Praga, si raccoglie in silenzio pesante la moltitudine che interroga gli orologi e invoca dalle lancette impassibili un passo più lento.


RAIMONDO ORSI


ANGELO SCHIAVIO

E' veramente finita per la squadra italiana?

Ed ecco il miracolo. La squadra italiana che fin qui ha tergiversato in un gioco incolore, repentinamente brucia.

Il fantasma della sconfitta la trasforma e il presagio della vittoria la guida. Ci vuole ancora un colpo di frusta? Lo dà Sobotka cogliendo un palo della rete di Combi. Allora gli azzurri si scatenano. Allora la partita diventa uno spettacolo indimenticabile di gioco gagliardo e di onore sportivo. Cessa di essere una gara di atleti, secondo le misure convenzionali delle tenzoni calcistiche. Acquista il calore, il palpito, l'accento di una sfida tra uomini. L'idolo dello sport cancella le macchie del gioco troppo focoso e risolve il combattimento in un dialogo drammatico, ma perfettamente leale tra la squadra che ha ghermito la vittoria e la squadra che non vuole uscire battuta dal campo. Gli azzurri attaccano, attaccano, attaccano.

Ora alla conclusione della partita mancano 15 minuti. E ora 12 e ora 10. Mancano soltanto 9 minuti e il cuore della moltitudine martella. All'improvviso un uragano di urla si abbatte sullo stadio. Un nome vince la tempesta delle grida inarticolate. Un giocatore in maglia azzurra è sollevato in trionfo dai camerati in maglia azzurra. Un giocatore in maglia bianca passa dolorosamente la mano sugli occhi, per fare un gesto di rassegnazione, poi si china per raccogliere la palla che dorme nel cantuccio estremo della sua rete. E' Orsi che ha pareggiato. E' Planicka che non ha potuto afferrare il tiro saettante. Nove minuti prima che la partita finisse, la squadra italiana ha agguantato il pareggio.

Non si è dubitato più di nulla. La squadra italiana avrebbe vinto il campionato del mondo. Questa convinzione s'è radicata immediatamente nel petto della folla. E il goal di Schiavio, al 5' dei tempi supplementari, è arrivato con l'irrevocabile precisione del tuono che compendia il fulmine.

***

Poi, sull'albero maestro dello stadio del Partito è salita, tra gli osanna, la bandiera tricolore. La bandiera di vittoria che svetta sulla sommità di un pennone sottile e quasi incorporeo come lo stelo in fiore, non è forse, per una moltitudine di patrioti, l'ala che conduce in paradiso?

Poi la moltitudine, posseduta da un sentimento ch'era di felicità e di gratitudine, di scatto e d'istinto, in un nembo di fazzoletti freneticamente agitati, in un'invocazione sovrana delle forze visibili ed invisibili, concrete ed arcane che avevano donato la grande ebbrezza della vittoria, s'è rivelata, al Titano che la scena grandiosa dominava col braccio teso e col sorriso sulle labbra. L'osanna al Duce ha l'intensità di un ciclone, l'austerità di un rito, il palpito commosso di un voto.

E poi la moltitudine, fiera della sagra atletica cui aveva assistito, ha rivolto il suo evviva caldo, cordiale, intenso ai mille e mille sportivi cecoslovacchi che erano in campo, ben riconoscibili dalle bandierine bianche e rosse che sventolavano senza posa. Nel segno fausto dell'amicizia, sull'onda di quella cortesia italica ch'è pregio e lume della nostra razza, gli sportivi delle due nazioni hanno confuso i colori dei gagliardetti, le effusioni dell'animo, i gesti di tripudio.

Dov'erano, in quell'istante i melanconici alfieri di tutte le invidie che avevano mosso i loro appunti verdi allo spirito sportivo del nostro popolo? Siano perdonati per l'ora di gaudio senza pari che Roma ha offerto al nostro cuore e ai nostri occhi, per lo spettacolo di civiltà esemplare che, ancora una volta e sempre, la madre di tutte le civiltà ha offerto al mondo.

***

La squadra italiana ha conquistato il campionato del mondo. Non basta: l'ha conquistato con una partita tutta in lettere maiuscole, con la partita che gli sportivi invocavano, pulita e trasparente come una lastra di cristallo, decisiva e perentoria come un colpo di spada. Perchè non dirlo, ora che il traguardo luminoso è stato raggiunto? Perchè non uscire dagli eufemismi e confessare a noi stessi che i punti di Firenze e di Milano, svitati da azioni torbide, avevano lasciato in noi e in tutti gli spettatori un velo di dispetto, di amarezza e, forse, di perplessità? Ci voleva una vittoria fatta tutta di ali, tutta succo sportivo, inequivocabile nell'impronta, per fugare le ombre, per convincere la moltitudine, per forzare la penna restia dei più caparbi giornalisti stranieri, per illuminare il valore del manipolo azzurro. Ci voleva la vittoria schietta, equilibrata e sonora, ricca e cantante come una strofe. Ci voleva la squadra che convince, più bella e più forte della squadra che vince.

E gli azzurri hanno dato agli italiani la vittoria che convince.

Non basta ancora. Per il modo col quale è stato conseguito, il trionfo degli azzurri si trasferisce dal terreno sportivo nel campo più vasto e più eletto dell'affermazione di razza. Vi sono partite nelle quali chi vince incomincia a vincere all'inizio, proponendo agli antagonisti la norma della superiorità stilistica: sono le partite a punteggio copioso e ad avversario umiliato. Di esse resta il risultato crudo e a volta indigesto, mentre il resoconto del cronista basta per raccontarle, commentarle ed archiviarle. Sono, insomma, le comuni vittorie degli atleti.

Ma vi è un altro tipo di gare, quello che, per il gioco delle vicende e per la influenza dell'imponderabile, scavano nel profondo dei combattenti, ne rivelano alla moltitudine il volto segreto.

Sono le rare, rarissime partite nelle quali si assiste alla metamorfosi dei giocatori, non più piccoli ometti colorati che fanno il loro mestiere, colla palla fra i piedi, ma piccoli militi valorosi che combattono per un'idea che è più grande di loro, ma che essi servono per il divino inconscio che è il genio dei soldati all'assalto. Sono le partite, in altre parole, dove non una squadra di undici uomini, ma una razza si manifesta colle sue attitudini e i suoi istinti, le sue collere e le sue estasi, il suo carattere e le sue pose. La partita che gli italiani hanno vinto allo Stadio appartiene a questa categoria di partite.

Pareva gara perduta. E sarebbe stato l'addio ad un bel sogno. I cecoslovacchi erano al comando e, dopo il goal, le loro azioni continuavano ad essere minacciose. Ricordarsi il « palo » di Sobotka dopo il punto di Puc. Si

(Continua in seconda pagina)

La grande corsa a tappe conclusa all'Arena di Milano

in uno scenario fantastico di folla ed in una vibrante atmosfera di passione sportiva - Gli altri premi del Capo del Governo, del Partito e del C. O. N. I. a Camusso, secondo a 51" dalla maglia rosa, e ai nuovi campioni Giovanni Cazzulani e Giuseppe Olmo

Nella luce della realtà

Il XXII Giro d'Italia e il suo meritevole vincitore han voluto che la folla trepidasse sino all'ultimo istante. L'atleta vittorioso e la manifestazione imponente e complessa, vissuta in uno scenario che il nostro cuore non dimenticherà, hanno concluso la loro differente vicenda in modo trionfale. Nemmeno l'ultima tappa è stata un giuoco per fanciulli. Ed anche nell'episodio finale la prova e il campione sono risultati l'uno degno del proprio prestigio e l'altra delle tradizioni che la distinguono.

Learco Guerra ha trionfato. Mancava alla collana dei successi conseguiti dal corridore mantovano la perla più interessante. Due volte secondo nel Giro di Francia, Guerra non aveva ancora vinto il Giro d'Italia. Nè era riuscito a conseguire, nella corsa nazionale a tappe, classifiche così onorevoli come quelle raggiunte al « Tour ».

Vincitore e campione

Strano atleta Guerra; strano nella sua stessa espressione di poderosità e nel segno della sua altissima classe. Forse è nella possanza fisica che distingue il campione d'Italia, la spiegazione di qualche manchevolezza che fece pensare e scrivere di Guerra come di un meraviglioso campione del ciclismo mondiale, ma anche come di un concorrente di rango più temibile in prove di un giorno, sia pure su distanze di fondo, che non in gare a tappe. Siamo nella [illegible] *sti giorni* [illegible] *guardi d*[illegible] *di una q*[illegible] *licatissim*[illegible] *cuparsi d*[illegible] *ra di par*[illegible] *preoccup*[illegible] *che dovr*[illegible] *dello sport ciclistico nazionale nel Campionato del Mondo s'è dichiarata assai più fiduciosa delle possibilità di Guerra nella disputa del massimo titolo che non di Guerra vincitore nello stesso anno del « Giro » e del « Tour »*

Ma adesso [illegible] *mma c'è nella collana, e il cam*[illegible] *quadro maesto*[illegible] *ell'avvenimento concluso ieri all'Arena, in maglia rosa piuttosto che nella suggestiva vivacità del drappo tricolore, rifulge comunque nel nitore di una luce splendente.*

Al termine di ogni grande manifestazione atletica è buona consuetudine quella di illustrare e i protagonisti dell'impresa e la qualità della prova condotta a compimento. Può darsi che taluno osservi che Guerra ha vinto grazie agli abbuoni. Il particolare non verrà trascurato quando si parlerà degli insegnamenti che sono sbocciati dalla ennesima edizione della corsa della « Gazzetta ».

Ma occorre dire subito che il regolamento del « Giro » non è stato compilato durante lo svolgimento della... gara, bensì prima del 19 maggio dell'Anno XII, sicchè gli abbuoni erano per tutti. Tant'è che anche Vignoli, Vervaecke, Olmo se li aggiudicarono vincendo nel modo richiesto dalla formula, la quale è molto più semplice di quella che danneggerà fortemente gli italiani che si apprestano alla fatica del Giro di Francia, se nessuno dei nostri rappresentanti paleserà le doti di Guerra negli arrivi in volata.

Due minuti di abbuono e il successo finale conseguito con 51" di vantaggio! Ma Guerra ha vinto il più severo Giro d'Italia di quest'ultimi anni. Ricordo che nel 1933 alle battute d'apertura della prova quando Binda e Guerra erano ancora alle prese, partirono le prime frecciate sulla facilità — del resto chiaramente denunciata dagli organizzatori tre mesi prima della pubblicazione del regolamento — del percorso. Il quale appariva, agli occhi dei competenti, favorevole a Guerra. Vinse Binda da lontano, specialmente in virtù del bottino fatto nei traguardi con premi a tempo, in salita. Quest'anno Guerra ha dovuto battersi fieramente lungo le rampe. Le quali sono state tante, che se il campione d'Italia non si fosse trovato in condizioni fisiche e di forma superiori, addio Giro d'Italia vittorioso!

Si è osservato spesso che gli avversari specialisti della salita non attaccavano il campione in maglia rosa. Ma era attaccabile il Guerra delle migliori giornate? Non gli mossero bat taglia, i piazzati, oppure non furono capaci di spuntarla? Sono i dati di cronaca che rispondono all'interrogativo. Nella prima tappa e nella tredicesima Guerra non parve in eccellenti condizioni. Lo attaccarono in salita e lo batterono. Cade anche, in parte il fatto che vuole Guerra battibile solamente quando la tappa di montagna è breve e le rampe si affrontano in partenza. A Torino si era a 10 km. dal traguardo quando il mantovano e tutti gli altri concorrenti cedettero a Camusso.

Bando dunque agli svolazzi e alle sottigliezze da ricercatori del famoso, quanto noioso, pelo: Learco Guerra ha vinto di forza il XXII Giro d'Italia, perchè è stato l'atleta più forte in campo. Si è battuto in salita con autorità a volte imperiosa, e a volte con energia selvaggia. Ed è passato invece come un dominatore in tutto il resto. Ecco perchè ha trionfato.

Le due tappe a cronometro? Sono quelle che hanno fatto rifulgere, pienamente il valore atletico del campione la cui statura sembrò in molti episodi enorme, giusto a dimostrazione che Guerra si batteva, manovrava, vinceva nelle condizioni di efficienza delle migliori annate.

Sia levato allora l'inno al vincitore e al campione.

Atleta del popolo, prediletto dalla folla, acclamato, benvoluto, incitato, come forse non fu mai nessun altro asso del ciclismo, Guerra ha anche saputo essere un tattico di primo ordine. Ma pur rispettando una linea di condotta impostasi assennatamente, il tricolore non ha potuto smorzare sempre la bella fiamma del proprio temperamento. La maglia rosa fu cauta dopo Ferrara. Prima, e Guerra e i grigi avevano saputo essere combattenti degni di ammirazione e di plauso. Gli è che Learco Guerra, cosciente delle proprie forze, sorretto dalla fiera volontà di vittoria, fermo nel convincimento di essere il più forte, ha disputato il XXII Giro d'Italia con le pile elettriche in corpo. Lo ha sorretto una fede luminosa e un senso di orgoglio smisurato. Se ha avuto qualche crisi ciò è dipeso da precedente eccesso di fiducia. Anche a Bologna, non intristì sul colpo di scena che l'aveva ricacciato indietro. Guerra è stato corridore completo nel quadro della prova che ha voluto e saputo vincere, perchè ha avuto la possibilità di armonizzare la potenza dei muscoli e la lucentezza dello spirito. Nè varrà alcuna nuvola, e non il desiderio della forma piccante a scalfire minimamente la bellezza della sua impresa vittoriosa. Che cosa contano le quisquiglie? E che cosa valgono i « domestici » e le « pulci »? Conta Guerra. Egli è un campione ed è un vincitore degno. Noi ci uniamo al popolo che lo applaude, dopo averlo seguito, osservato, ammirato. E diciamo anche al cavaliere Giovanni Maino, che è sportivo ed è gentiluomo, la parola franca di rallegramento.


LEARCO GUERRA

Si compila il bilancio

Ed eccoci al bilancio conclusivo. Un amico appassionato di ciclismo, appassionato e dirigente, leggendo un giorno, durante lo svolgimento del XXII Giro d'Italia, una voce discordante da quelle che riferivano con entusiasmo o con obbiettività sulle vicende della manifestazione che galvanizza la passione delle masse, ci fu cortese di una segnalazione in proposito. Asseriva il camerata che la voce all'opposizione era offensiva della verità, e concludeva al grido: evviva il Giro d'Italia.

Sì, evviva il Giro d'Italia ciclistico, fiamma di passione, prova a sfondo popolare, avvenimento propagandistico e organizzativo degno della forza e del prestigio dello sport fascista.

Basta con l'esaltazione di altre gare che si svolgono all'estero e che non possono seppellire la prova italiana a tappe. Basta con la illustrazione delle spettacolose e spettacolari tappe di montagna del « Tour », attraverso il Colle del Telegrafo e del Galibier, dell'Aubisque e del Tourmalet, con arrivi in gruppo di dieci o di venti uomini, e non più la denigrazione di tutto quanto reca etichetta nazionale.

Non vengono alla punta della nostra penna, certo, le frasi fatte. Nè pensiamo di allineare parole e aggettivi inzuccherati, per la necessità assoluta di dire bene, benissimo di tutto. Sappiamo che se la prova vinta meritatamente da Guerra fosse giunta sino all'atto decisivo, con Guerra, Binda, metti: Demuysère, Camusso, Olmo, Bertoni, Max Bulla, Gotti, Vignoli, Cazzulani, nello spazio di due... minuti, sarebbe riuscita più avvicente.

Emilio Colombo

(Vedere la continuazione in terza pagina).

La classifica definitiva

1. **GUERRA LEARCO** di Mantova che ha compiuto la complessiva distanza di km. 3706.2 in ore . . . . 121.17'17"
   tempo reale, dedotti i due minuti di abbuono ricevuti per le vittorie di tappa a Teramo e a Firenze, ore 121.19'17"; media generale km. 30,548.
2. CAMUSSO FRANCESCO di Cumiana in ore . . . . . . 121.18'08"
3. *Cazzulani Giovanni* di Lardello Cremonese in ore . . . . . 121.22'16"
4. Olmo Giuseppe di Celle Ligure in ore . . . . 121.22'56"
[illegible] ore . . . . 121.25'16"
[illegible] re . . . . 121.28'10"
[illegible] 2'47"
[illegible] 2'03"
[illegible] 3'15"
[illegible] 0'35"
[illegible] 1'30"
Primo degli stranieri

12.	Rogora B., Solbiate Olona	121.52'28"	30.	Vervaecke Fel., Dadizeele (Secondo degli stranieri)	123.09'01"
13.	Scorticati R., Reggio Em. (Terzo degl'isolati)	121.54'15"	31.	Ghesquiere Alfonso, Ypres (Terzo degli stranieri)	123.21'22"
14.	Mealli Adalino, Malva	121.54'20"	32.	Giuppone Stef. Demonte	123.26'44"
15.	Zanzi Augusto, Varese	122.00'24"	33.	Scacchetti P., S. Giac. Seg.	123.37'50"
16.	Como A., Cassano Spin.	122.05'25"	34.	Carlotti L., S. Bart. Bosco	123.39'51"
17.	Teani Orlando, Massa	122.06'50"	35.	De Paolis G., Palestrina	123.46'24"
18.	[illegible], [illegible] Tor.	122.10'18"	36.	Andretta Antonio, Tombolo	123.48'18"
19.	Morelli Ambrogio, Nerviano	122.15'11"	37.	Trueba Vic., Torrelavega	123.59'38"
20.	Masarati Attilio, Caorso	122.25'11"	38.	Zucchini Armando, Altedo	124.05'15"
21.	Piubellini Isidoro, Caccivio	122.31'52"	39.	Pancera G., Castelnuovo V.	124.06'26"
22.	Battesini Fabio, Mantova	122.32'12"	40.	Guarducci U., P. V. Ceppi	124.09'54"
23.	Astrua B., Graglia Biellese	122.32'25"	41.	Moretti C., S. Maria Rossa	124.25'42"
24.	Sella N., Caresana Vercell.	122.42'30"	42.	Galateau F., Nantoi-la-Foss	124.29'25"
25.	Oria C., S. Mauro Torinese	122.45'29"	43.	Merlino Vincenzo, Tunisi	124.40'53"
26.	Grassi Clemente, Corbetta	122.46'13"	44.	Salazard Vincent, La Celle St. Cl.	124.54'42"
27.	Meini Ettore, Cascina	122.54'34"	45.	Sieronski H., Berlino	125.02'15"
28.	Merlini Ernesto, Rho	122.58'19"	46.	Rinaldi Angelo, Basaluzzo	125.11'39"
29.	Baroni Giuseppe, Bareggio	123.08'33"	47.	Bulla Max, Vienna	125.13'52"
			48.	Fraccaroli Antonio, Verona	125.32'52"
			49.	Abondio Gius., Mazamet	125.39'01"
			50.	Gulli Francesco, Bertonico	126.12'05"
			51.	Mammina Nicolò, Monreale	126.19'44"
			52.	Pavesi Attilio, Caorso	128.02'48"

The front page of the Italian sports newspaper *La Gazzetta dello Sport* celebrates Italy's historic victory

Third/Fourth Place Play-Off between defeated Semi-Finalists Germany and Austria with the World Cup's first bronze medal going to Otto Nerz's side, who showed no signs of a Semi-Final hangover as the impressive outside-right Ernst Lehner put the Germans 1-0 ahead inside the first minute. Another from Lehner meant Germany went in to the break with a 3-1 lead, with Meisl's Austrian side only able to grab one back in the second half in Naples.

CARRIED OFF THE PITCH BY HIS PLAYERS, VITTORIO POZZO WAS HAILED AS ONE OF THE INTERNATIONAL GAME'S MASTER TACTICIANS.

Three days later came Italy's, and their leader's, big day. Such was the importance that Mussolini had placed on a home win that he had even commissioned a trophy of his own, the Coppa del Duce, to hand out alongside FIFA's golden statuette. Not surprisingly, it dwarfed FIFA's version.

Clash of the keepers

In a scenario that would not be repeated for another 48 years, both finalists were captained by their goalkeepers. Giampiero Combi and Frantisek Plánicka had been in fine form throughout their respective campaigns, and were rated alongside Spain's Zamora as Europe's best.

But defensive sturdiness was not the sole pre-match focus. The Czechoslovakians favoured Austria's Danubian style of short passing, and in Semi-Final hat-trick hero Nejedly and the man who would go on to be their record international goalscorer, Antonin Puc, they posed a formidable and potent attacking threat.

Just as they had done against Austria and Spain, the Italians would adopt a physical, high-pressure approach, in the hope that their superior fitness levels would again overcome finer opposition.

Although he would finish as the tournament's top scorer, Nejedly was kept quiet by the ever-stout Monti. But Pozzo's defence failed to do the same with Puc. When the man from Slavia Prague beat Combi with 14 minutes to go, spinning superbly on his right to fire in a crisp left-foot drive from just inside the area, the home crowd watched in stunned silence.

Argentinians to the rescue

As the Italians searched for an equaliser, they were left vulnerable on the break. Frantisek Svoboda struck the post and Jiri Sobotka was denied by Combi as boss Petru, nervously pacing the touchline, sensed a shock. Instead, with nine minutes remaining, Pozzo had his Argentinians to thank. Guaita found Orsi, whose wonderful feint dummied three defenders, before planting the ball high into the roof of the net.

The Italians had forced extra-time, and once again they knew it would be to their advantage. In the 95th minute, Guaita was again the provider. This time he found Schiavio, the man who had scored his country's opening goal two weeks earlier, who completed the circle by beating a defender and applying a delightfully composed finish.

Italy would hold on, and Monti was able to add a winners' medal to his silver he had earned four years earlier with Argentina. Carried off the pitch by his players, Vittorio Pozzo was hailed as one of the international game's master tacticians, and, bolstered by his success, would go on to lead his team in France four years later.

There remained only one thing left to do that afternoon in Rome. The tournament's three best sides lined up on the pitch to see their country's respective flags hoisted high above the Stadio Nazionale.

As the Italian national anthem belted out from the loudspeakers, Benito Mussolini watched on as *Il Tricolore* was raised, high above the rest.

His masterplan had worked.



June, 10 1934, Rome. The victorious Italian team carry their coach Vittorio Pozzo after the final whistle. The temperature was 39°C.

FRANCE 1938

DESPITE FASCIST POSTURING, VITTORIO POZZO'S ITALIANS DOMINATED TO RECORD THEIR SECOND SUCCESSIVE WORLD CUP WIN. MEANWHILE, BRAZIL ANNOUNCED THEIR ARRIVAL IN SPECTACULAR FASHION.

With Europe on the brink of war, the third World Cup took place against an uneasy and uncertain political backdrop. Four years after Italian dictator Benito Mussolini had used the competition as a mouthpiece to broadcast his fascist message to the world, FIFA were determined to avoid any kind of repeat.

It would prove a difficult task. Under the masterful leadership of coach Vittorio Pozzo, the Azzurri remained a formidable footballing outfit, not to mention willing propaganda pawns. And in an effort to portray harmony on the continent, the controversial decision was made to keep the tournament on European soil. France, championed by FIFA president and proud Frenchman Jules Rimet, was deemed suitably neutral, with Nazi Germany's bid rebuffed.

South American slight

In a twist of irony, the choice of host also strained relations across the Atlantic. Argentina had expected to be awarded the tournament, believing in an unwritten promise of rotation that would have seen the Finals return to South America following an eight-year absence. Disgruntled with the snub, Argentina refused to enter. Uruguay, too, would remain at home for the second tournament running, yet to return following their superb win in the 1930 event. They weren't the only ones. Unwilling to risk such a gruelling voyage in these times of uncertainty, and perhaps still smarting from a 7-1 hammering from Italy four years previously, the USA opted out for the first time. Withdrawals also came from Colombia, Peru, Paraguay, Costa Rica and Mexico, presenting Cuba with an automatic route into the World Cup for the first time in their history. When Japan also failed to enter the qualifying process, the Dutch East Indies found themselves enjoying the same fate, as the tournament line-up began to take on an unfamiliar look and feel.

June 10, 1938, Paris. The great Italian football team with coach Vittorio Pozzo line up before kick-off at the World Cup Final against Hungary at the Stade Olympique de Colombes.

There were debutants in Europe too, as Poland and Norway qualified at the expense of Yugoslavia and the Irish Free State respectively, but once again much of the focus was on those who wouldn't be making an appearance. The ongoing Spanish Civil War prevented the 1934 Quarter-Finalists from building on their undoubted potential. And despite qualifying ahead of Latvia, Austria's annexation into the Third Reich saw them drop out, with some of the much-vaunted "Wunderteam" joining the German squad that had finished top of their qualifying group with three wins from three.

The Latvians weren't given the chance to plug the gap, with an attempt made to offer England an olive branch instead, as the Football Association continued their stubborn exile from FIFA. Yet to make an appearance in the World Cup Finals, England once more declined, and the decision was made to press ahead with a tournament that would only feature 15 nations.

Venues far and wide

As the host nation and as a beneficiary of one of FIFA's few policies that has stood the test of time, France qualified automatically. Moreover, they had also taken Italy's lead from four years earlier and designed the schedule so that the tournament could tour the country, with ten cities acting as hosts. Though Lyon would ultimately miss out following Austria's withdrawal, matches were still played as far north as Lille, to all the way down south in Marseille and even across to the German border in Strasbourg, the idea being to encourage a greater number of foreign visitors from neighbouring European cities to come to France to see the matches.

The world stays away

Holders Italy had also been spared the hassle of playing any of the preliminary rounds but with only three non-Europeans taking part, and just the one making the trip from South America, FIFA had once again encountered a now familiar dilemma. Worryingly, FIFA's World Cup was proving to be anything but a fair representation of world football. The advent of long-distance commercial air travel after World War II would eventually help to solve that issue, of course, but for now the organisers would be thankful that the nation flying the flag for South America was a scintillating Brazil. Its reputation for jaw-dropping football began here.

FIFA continued with the straight knockout format that they had begun in 1934, having found success in its neat tendency to produce 90 minutes of thrilling action, with the potential promise of extra-time and replays if the teams couldn't be separated.

To their delight, they found the same occurred from the very start in France too. Five of the opening seven games would require extra-time, and two of these then went on to a replay, contested on the following day.

Brazil turn on the style

The Brazilians, keen to ensure they would not again return home at the first opportunity, sent their strongest side and contributed to perhaps one of the greatest First Round games ever played in the history of the World Cup. Today, of course, tournament openers have a marked tendency to be cagey and circumspect but in France in 1938, it was anything but.

Poland would provide the opposition, and Józef Kaluza's new boys would play their part





France '38 poster.

in an 11-goal thriller in Strasbourg. Striker Leônidas opened the scoring on 18 minutes as Brazil wowed the 13,000-strong crowd with a flamboyance and freedom the likes of which simply hadn't been seen before on the continent. Trailing 3-1 at half-time, the Poles hit back superbly after the break. Ernest Wilimowski was the man in form, netting a splendid hat-trick as the 90 minutes finished at four goals apiece.

Extra-time loomed, and although Wilimowski became the first player to score four goals in a World Cup match, he still, somewhat incredibly, ended up on the losing side. Instead it would be Leônidas, himself completing a hat-trick with two goals in extra-time, who proved to be the match winner as a breathless encounter finished 6-5 in favour of the South Americans. The match ensured that the French crowd took an immediate liking to the fearless young Brazilian side. Leônidas' trademark bicycle kicks were a particular highlight, and his shining displays earned him the nickname "Black Diamond". Having scored his side's only goal in a 3-1 defeat to Spain at the last World Cup, the Flamengo striker was determined to hang around longer this time.

ALTHOUGH POLAND'S ERNEST WILIMOWSKI BECAME THE FIRST PLAYER TO SCORE FOUR GOALS IN A WORLD CUP MATCH, HE STILL ENDED UP ON THE LOSING SIDE.

France were also desperate to improve on their World Cup record. Memories of their crushing extra time loss to Austria in Turin four years earlier were still with fans and players alike when they were drawn against neighbours Belgium. But when Emile Veinante scored inside the first minute before Jean Nicolas got the first of his two goals to make it 2-0 after just 16 minutes, the nerves had gone. Les Bleus won 3-1, and the national mood was one of confidence that Gaston Barreau's side could continue the trend of World Cup-winning hosts.

Hungary, meanwhile, were merciless in a 6-0 win over Dutch East Indies, who seemed happy enough to be involved, while Norway took the mighty Italians to extra-time in Marseille.

Unpopular champions

FIFA's hope that the political undercurrent would not bubble over was looking forlorn when the Italians gave fascist salutes in the pre-match line-ups. The 19,000 Stade Vélodome crowd were not impressed, booing and jeering every Azzurri touch. Unfortunately for them, and the Norwegians, the defending champions revelled in their role as tournament villains. Despite conceding an equaliser seven minutes from time, Lazio's Silvio Piola scored the decider four minutes into extra-time. Captained by their 1934 hero Giuseppe Meazza, the Italians were the team to beat.

Not all debutants would be heading home early, as Cuba provided one of the shocks of the tournament. Perhaps in an effort to ensure


June 5, 1938, Strasbourg. Brazilian forward Leônidas (L) stars in one of the greatest ever World Cup games – a 6-5 victory over a dogged Poland.

that they would not be making the long return journey home after just one game – as all non-European sides had been forced to do in Italy – FIFA had generously seeded the Cubans along with Brazil, Germany, France, Hungary and 1934 Finalists Italy and Czechoslovakia. The Cubans had nevertheless drawn a tough tie, against an experienced Romanian team making their third World Cup appearance. Only 7,000 turned up in Toulouse but those who stayed at home missed another classic.

With the game poised at 1-1 and only three minutes to go, Tomás Fernández grabbed what seemed to be a Cuban winner before Romania equalised almost from the restart, sending the match into extra-time. This time, another Cuban goal three minutes before time sealed a replay after they had fallen behind to Stefan Dobay's 105th minute strike. Four days later, thousands more attended to see Cuba come from behind to win 2-1 and record their first, and so far only, World Cup win. Their joy would be short-lived. Sweden, benefiting from a First Round bye following Austria's no-show, would end the Cuban fairy tale with a brutal 8-0 victory in the Quarter-Final.

Their struggle

At the Parc des Princes, Switzerland ensured that France's anti-fascist demonstrators would have only one team to rally against by defeating Germany 4-2 in a replay. The Germans, with their white kits now comprising a red collar to reflect the Nazi flag, were given a rough ride by a hostile Parisian crowd, some of whom even threw broken bottles.

Coach Sepp Herberger had been instructed to include five of the newly-integrated Austrian players in his first team and it was no surprise to see the blame directed at them. Herberger would still be in charge when Germany won their first title in 1954, but this time they were heading home.

The Brazilian bandwagon arrived in Bordeaux for their Quarter-Final match with Czechoslovakia, who had seen off the Dutch 3-0 in the First Round. Once again Leônidas was the toast of the town, scoring two goals in two hotly-disputed games. Famed Czechoslovakian keeper Frantisek Planicka suffered a broken arm and star striker Oldrich Nejedlý a broken leg – after equalising Leônidas' opener – in a game that would become known as the 'Battle of Bordeaux'. Both sides were forced to field a number of reserves in the replay, but without Planicka and Nejedlý – the Golden Boot winner in Italy – Czechoslovakia struggled and lost 2-1.

Mussolini's political game

The tie of the round saw the hosts face Italy in Paris. Once again, the Italians caused a stir before a ball had been kicked. Following a blue kit clash, the Italians were asked to wear their away shirt, traditionally white. Ever the political opportunist, Mussolini ordered the team to don black shirts, symbolising the much-feared Italian fascist paramilitaries. It was an inflammatory gesture that enraged the crowd but nevertheless inspired the Italians. Piola was again on the scoresheet as the holders proved superior on the pitch, winning 3-1 and breaking the hearts of the 58,000 in attendance. For the first time, the World Cup would not be won by the hosts.

Hungary, courtesy of a hard-fought 2-0 win over Switzerland, would complete the Semi-Final line-up having scored eight goals and yet to concede. Their opponents, Sweden, had an identical record, the difference being that Hungarian coach József Nagy's Swedish side were yet to be severely tested having played only the one game against Cuba.

The difference would be Hungary's greater preparation. Gyula Zsengellér, their 22-year-old striker, scored his fourth and fifth goals of a prolific campaign in a convincing 5-1 win at Parc des Princes in Paris. Hungary would advance to their first Final at the expense of Sweden and their Budapest-born manager Nagy, who would go down as the first coach to face his native country.


June 19, 1938, Paris. Italy, in blue rather than black shirts, defeated Hungary 4-2 in the World Cup Final.

The much-anticipated second Semi-Final took place at the Stade Vélodrome. Could the pure, free-flowing Brazilians overcome the superbly organised, and seemingly unbeatable Italians? The French had their hopes pinned on the acrobatic forward Leônidas. But when the teams were announced, shock registered on the faces of the attending Marseillais – the Black Diamond had been left out of the team.

In an extraordinary show of arrogance and complacency, Brazil manager Adhemar Pimenta had hoped to keep Leônidas rested and refreshed for the World Cup Final. The two taxing Quarter-Final ties against Czechoslovakia had taken a toll on the striker, but it would prove to be one of the costliest managerial mistakes in World Cup history.

Following captain Meazza's second-half penalty that put his side into a commanding 2-0 lead with an hour gone, Italy saw out the game, wobbling only once when Romeu pulled one back with three minutes to go.

Pimenta was left to rue his decision to drop Leônidas, particular when he returned to the side for the Third/Fourth Place Play-Off against Sweden and scored two in a 4-2 Brazilian victory – the Brazilians having been 2-0 down within 38 minutes. The Brazilians were nonetheless delighted to secure their first World Cup bronze, while Leônidas deservedly finished top scorer, with seven goals.

Pozzo panache

Unusually, Paris' Stade Olympique de Colombe was not quite full for the Final on June 19. Attendances had already begun to dwindle once France had been eliminated, but around 45,000 still packed the stands to see if Alfréd Schaffer could be the first World Cup manager to outfox Vittorio Pozzo. Of Pozzo's chosen XI, only two – captain Meazza and Giovanni Ferrari – had featured in his 1934 squad. Incredibly, though, the Old Master had managed to cultivate two almost completely different World Cup sides and get both to the Final.

Having received a pre-match telegram from Mussolini, the Italians were in no doubt as to the importance of the occasion. The game started off at a frenetic pace. Gino Colaussi fired in after only six minutes, but Hungary hit back only two minutes later, with Pál Titkos beating Aldo Olivieri from a tight angle with a left-foot strike.

But the Italians were not to be denied. Hurt at suggestions that their maiden World Cup win was one that had been built on brute force and the cushion of home advantage, Pozzo's men had added an element of artistry and dynamism to their play. By winning in France, however, they would prove the latter theory wrong too.

Captain fantastic

At their heart was Internazionale's Meazza, just 5'6", who had created all three of Italy's goals as they went in to the break 3-1 up. The player of the tournament Piola found the top right corner of Antal Szabó's goal for their second, while Colaussi had added another from close range.

Cheered on by the French, the Magyars pulled one back on 70 minutes through the 6'1" striker György Sárosi, but Piola ended all hopes of a nervy finish with the goal of the game on 81 minutes, striking the ball with the outside of his left boot past Szabó's despairing dive.

Remarkably, Pozzo had done it again. Regardless of their black-shirted political posturings, his Azzurri side were deserved winners, and the first side to successfully defend their title. But they would hold on to the trophy for longer than anticipated. A year later, the world's best players would be called to arms, and the FIFA World Cup would not return for another 12 years.


ALLEN
COUPE
DU
MONDE
1938

WORLD CUP ICONS

GIUSEPPE MEAZZA

Arguably football's first ever genuine superstar, Giuseppe "Peppino" Meazza was the heartbeat of Italy's World Cup winning sides of 1934 and 1938.

Agile, creative and always elegant, Meazza's attacking prowess and adept dribbling made him the scourge of opposition teams. Often, it was as much as defenders could do just to hack him down, assuming, of course, they could get anywhere near him in the first place.

His striking good looks, meanwhile, coupled with his astonishing goalscoring rate made him a marketeer's dream and he landed lucrative endorsements advertising everything from toothpaste to haircare products.

But while Meazza walked the walk, he certainly talked the talk as well, both for his clubs and his country. At Inter Milan he plundered 242 goals in 365 games and also chalked up 33 goals in 53 caps for Italy too.

By the time he retired in 1947 he had won two World Cup titles and a hat-trick of Scudettos with his beloved Internazionale. But more than that. He had won Italy's heart.



Italy captain Giuseppe Meazza was a vital part of Italy's World Cup winning sides of 1934 and 1938.





BRAZIL 1950

FOLLOWING THE END OF WORLD WAR II, BRAZIL REVIVED THE WORLD CUP WITH A THREE-WEEK CARNIVAL, BUT CLOSE RIVALS URUGUAY WOULD SPOIL THE MARACANA PARTY WITH SOME TACTICAL BRILLIANCE.

With much of Europe lying in ruins, it was Brazil who came to FIFA's rescue and offered to pick up the World Cup baton after a 12-year hiatus brought on by the Second World War. In true Brazilian fashion, the South Americans were determined to put on the most flamboyant footballing spectacle ever witnessed and to do this, they needed to build the world's greatest sporting arena.

And that they did. The Estádio do Maracanã, designed by a team of seven Brazilian architects, was the largest football stadium ever constructed. It would stage the host's first match and, according to a pre-tournament script written by 52 million Brazilians, their eventual triumph. Having secured third place in Italy in 1938, the football-obsessed nation was convinced that their beloved *A Seleção* would go the whole way this time around, and lift the World Cup trophy for the first time.

The now famous golden statuette had been officially renamed the Jules Rimet Cup, to celebrate the return of FIFA's prestigious tournament and also mark the 25th anniversary of Jules Rimet's presidency.

That the trophy was still around to be won was thanks in no small part to Dr Ottorino Barassi of the Italian Football Federation. Barassi had secretly removed it from a bank in Rome and hidden it in a shoebox under his bed throughout the war, saving it from falling into the hands of occupying Nazi troops. Along with their world-class stadium, Brazil's proposal included a significant format change.

Return of the group stage

Keen to recoup some of the expense they had spent on new facilities and infrastructure, the organisers intended to revert to an initial group stage, as favoured in Uruguay in 1930. Following this, the four group winners would advance to a final pool, where each team would play each other once. The nation leading the table following the final game would be crowned champions. Despite initial resistance from FIFA, Brazil's insistence eventually paid off. Group games meant more

July 2, 1950, Belo Horizonte. Uruguay's Julio Pérez is thwarted by Bolivia's Eduardo Guttiérrez. Uruguay still scored eight.


July 3, 1950, Belo Horizonte. England's goalkeeper Bert Williams is beaten by USA's Joe Gaetjens in the World Cup's biggest shock.

matches and more gate receipts. It would also guarantee each side at least three games, ridding the potential for elimination after only one game.

FIFA hoped that this would attract more European interest and solve an issue that had plagued the first three World Cups. Only four European teams made the trip to Uruguay in 1930, while South American sides proved just as reluctant to cross the Atlantic when the competition was hosted on European soil. An added issue for the game's governing body was that the world football map had changed considerably following the war. Occupied Germany and Japan were banned, while most of the Eastern European sides behind the Iron Curtain chose not to enter.

Disagreements continue

The new format required 16 teams, and 34 nations entered qualifying. But by the time kick-off approached, only 13 sides had made the trip, as FIFA once again struggled with recruitment. High-profile withdrawals included Argentina, following a disagreement with the Brazilians, and France, who refused to travel when the draw threw up group games 2,000 miles apart. The 1938 Quarter-Finalists felt the travel required between games was an unfair burden in addition to the initial journey over from Europe.

There were plenty of positive additions, though. The 1930 champions Uruguay would finally make a second World Cup appearance, while this would be the first World Cup with a healthy mix of European and South American sides, as six teams from Europe arrived following successful qualification. Excitingly, England were one of these, after the Home Nations had ended their exile from FIFA and decided to use the 1950 British Home Championship as the qualification process.

Scotland qualify... and refuse to go

England had finished top and would be making their first ever Finals appearance, while runners-up Scotland had also qualified. In a bizarre stance, however, Scottish FA chairman George Graham stood by bold comments he'd made before qualifying, when he insisted Scotland would only head to Brazil as British champions. Despite the best attempts of England and Scotland captains Billy Wright and George Young to persuade him otherwise, a stubborn Graham withdrew the Scots. Even more peculiar circumstances saw India also drop out at the last minute. Having only made it due to the withdrawal of Burma, The Philippines and Indonesia, they had been drawn in Group 3 to face Paraguay, Sweden and defending champions Italy. Like France, they cited travel costs as the main concern, though FIFA's ruling preventing teams from playing barefoot, as India had done at the 1948 Olympics, was said to be a factor.

Brazilians return in style

In Group 1, the hosts opened proceedings in typically scintillating style. Relatively untouched by the war, Brazil were brimming with confidence and feeding off the palpable buzz in Rio de Janeiro, then the capital, ahead of the Maracanã's opening game.

The previous year, Brazil had won the South American Football Championship on home soil in commanding fashion. They'd won six of their seven games in a league format, scoring a phenomenal 39 goals and conceding only seven. Paraguay finished second with an inferior goal difference. With seven goals in that tournament, Vasco da

Gama striker Ademir was now a familiar face to the South American audience. And it wouldn't be long before Brazil's number nine (this was the first World Cup to introduce shirt numbers), with his prominent underbite, would announce himself to the world, with two goals as Brazil crushed Mexico 4-0.

But the first signs that not everything would go the Brazilians' way occurred in São Paulo four days later. The Swiss, recovering well from an opening 3-0 defeat to Yugoslavia, held the hosts 2-2, courtesy of two goals from Jacky Fatton. With the Yugoslavians defeating Mexico 4-1 only hours later in Porto Alegre, Brazil's first real test of nerves would occur in a group decider in Rio.

A draw would suffice for Milorad Arsenijevic's Yugoslavia side, who had a real chance to break the hearts of the 142,000 packed inside the Maracanã. They weren't afforded any favours, as forward Rajko Mitic banged his head off a metal girder on his way out of the tunnel. Suffering a heavy gash, he was forced to miss the first 20 minutes to receive medical attention, and wasn't even aware that Ademir had given the Brazilians the lead in the third minute until told so at half-time by his teammates.

Mitic wasn't able to inspire his side after the break and Brazil went 2-0 up through Flamengo's attacking midfielder Zizinho. Despite an admirable effort, the Yugoslavians were heading home, and Brazil, to everybody's relief, were through.

England disaster

Meanwhile in Group 2, one of the biggest shocks in world football was taking place. As the tournament's only debutants, much was expected of Walter Winterbottom's England side. Boasting the great names of Tom Finney, Stanley Matthews and Billy Wright, they were ranked among the favourites for the title. No one believed that more so than the English, who had long considered themselves the best side in the world despite their stubborn resistance to prove it officially.

Their campaign began with relative ease, with a 2-0 win over Chile in Rio thanks to goals from Blackpool's Stan Mortensen and Middlesbrough's Wilf Mannion.

At the same time in Curitiba, Spain were beating a part-time USA side 3-1. The US were managed by Scotsman Bill Jeffrey, who did his best to instil organisation and discipline into his hastily-assembled squad in the face of superior talent. It had so nearly worked, leading 1-0 with ten minutes to go before three goals in eight minutes saw the Spanish take the victory.

Led by their forward Telmo Zarra, Spain were the only group side expected to cause England any problems, though the side labelled the "Kings of Football" were still overwhelming favourites to reach the Final Pool without too much concern. So it was maybe with one eye on a potential group decider that prompted what happened in Belo Horizonte on June 29.



July 9, 1950, Rio de Janeiro. In-form Brazilian forward Ademir watches the ball fly into the net as he scores his first of four goals past Sweden's Kalle Svensson at the Maracanã stadium. Brazil beat Sweden 7-1 in front of 138,886.



With Matthews, England's best player, watching from the bench, Jeffrey's part-timers were under the cosh from the off as the array of English attacking talent besieged keeper Frank Borghi's goal.

Before the game, Jeffrey had admitted his players were sheep ready for the slaughter, while the English newspapers joked that the opposition should be given a three-goal headstart. As it turned out, they were given one. Just as they had done against the Spanish, the Americans took a shock first-half lead, Haitian Joe Gaetjens diverting a long-range Walter Bahr effort past Bert Williams in the 38th minute.

Somehow, the US held on to their lead until half-time. As news spread from the Estádio Independência, the crowd of 10,000 had visibly swelled by the time the second-half kicked off. Those who turned up witnessed sporting history, later dubbed the "miracle on grass" in the States. As Borghi, a hearse driver from Missouri, made save after save, it would be the English who would feel as though they were at their own funeral.

In the final minutes, with Winterbottom's side throwing everything at the US, the Americans even came close to doubling their lead. Only a goal-line clearance from future England manager Alf Ramsey prevented Frank Wallace from making it 2-0. It mattered not, as the US held on to record a famous victory. With England stunned and humiliated, goalscorer Gaetjens was carried off the pitch by the home crowd.

The result was so unexpected that when the news reached England, many had presumed the 0-1 scoreline to be a newspaper misprint, and that the match must have finished 10-1.There was no confusion three days later though, as the English were heading home. Zarra was on the mark again as the Spanish progressed at their expense with a 1-0 win in Rio, to conclude a humbling experience for England's overly-confident and underprepared side.

Crown slips

In Group 3, Italy failed to defend their crown for a third time. This was no longer the all-conquering Italian juggernaut of the Thirties, having been robbed of a generation of talent through a tragedy that would rock Italian football a year before.

The Superga air disaster on May 4, 1949 saw each member of Torino's title-winning squad perish when their Italian Airlines flight from Lisbon, following a friendly with Benfica, crashed on return to Turin into an embankment by the Basilica of Superga – a hilltop, domed church. All 31 people on board died, including team management, airline crew and accompanying journalists.

Italian football was in mourning, and their national team was severely depleted. The *Il Grande Torino* side of the Forties had been dominant, winning five consecutive Serie A titles and forming the spine of the



Azzurri. Understandably shaken, the reigning champions took some persuading to enter the 1950 World Cup. Eventually they agreed to take part, but unlike their European rivals, they would not be making the trip by air, opting instead for voyage by sea.

Despite a valiant effort from a squad now featuring only two Torino players, they succumbed to a 3-2 defeat to Sweden in their opening game. Coached by Barnsley-born George Raynor, the Swedes had proved their burgeoning talent two years earlier when claiming the gold medal at the 1948 Olympics in London.

Needing only a point to qualify, the Swedes drew 2-2 with Paraguay, leaving the final group game a dead rubber. Italy nevertheless defeated the Paraguayans 2-0 to leave Brazil with their heads held high, but Italy's 16-year reign as World Cup holders was over.

Goals abound

Returning Uruguay completed the Final Pool following a straightforward 8-0 win over their sole Group 4 rivals Bolivia. Due to the incomplete nature of the Finals line-up, Uruguay's favourable draw could have proved to be a disadvantage. Not only were Bolivia one of the weaker sides in the tournament, but *La Celeste* were forced to wait a week to begin their campaign.

Unlike their rivals, they lacked serious match practice. Nonetheless, they progressed in a style akin to their hosts, including a hat-trick from Oscar Miguez.

With the four best sides in place, the tournament stepped up a notch in its final week. Goals were in abundance, especially from the boys in white, Brazil. Eventual Golden Boot winner Ademir racked up four more goals, Chico two and Maneco marked his only goal of the tournament as the Maracanã witnessed its biggest win yet, a 7-1 demolition of Sweden. When they followed this result four days later with a Zizinho-inspired 6-1 victory over Spain, it was easy to see why a host nation bubbling with excitement and fervour was already declaring Brazil as winners with one game to go.

But their South American rivals were clinging on. After a 2-2 draw with Spain, Uruguay found themselves trailing Sweden 2-1 with 13 minutes to go in São Paulo's Estádio do Pacaembu. Following his hat-trick in their opener against Bolivia, Miguez chose the perfect time to add two further goals to his tournament tally, scoring the winner in the 85th minute. It all meant that, with Brazil topping the groups on four points and

THE WORLD'S LARGEST CROWD FELL COMPLETELY SILENT, AS DISBELIEF SWEPT THE NATION. BRAZIL'S GREAT DAY HAD FINISHED IN IMPOSSIBLE DESPAIR.

Uruguay second on three, the first and only World Cup to not have an official Final would have one in all but name.

On July 16, 1950, the world witnessed the largest crowd in football history, as 200,000 people piled into the Maracanã (stadium construction would not be fully complete until 15 years later) expecting nothing less than a famous Brazilian victory. The home side only needed a point, but the expectant masses knew that there was no way a team who had scored 22 goals in just six matches were going to settle for a draw, particularly against a Uruguay side who had scraped their way past the same opposition, and who'd been brushed aside 5-1 by Brazil in their South American Football Championship success the year before.

Brazil expects

The streets of Rio buzzed with anticipation, as fans waved flags and held banners proclaiming their team the winners. Morning newspapers printed Brazil's team photograph under the heading "World champions". The country's fans, media and politicians were not prepared to wait a mere 90 minutes to celebrate their maiden World Cup win.

Unfortunately for them, they had greatly underestimated Uruguay's *garra*. Literally translated as "claw", it would become a word synonymous with this Uruguayan side, symbolising their grit, guts and determination against the odds. No one embodied this spirit quite like their captain Obdulio Varela. Having seen the presumptuous newspaper headlines on the morning of the Final, he bought every copy the hotel owned and proceeded to lay them out on his bathroom floor. He then encouraged his teammates to urinate over them.

Given the shape and dimensions of the Maracanã, the Finalists must have felt like they were playing inside a goldfish bowl, unable to escape the crazed carnival atmosphere surrounding them on all sides. But if the Brazilians were nervous, they failed to show any signs in the opening minutes as they launched a number of attacks through their familiar avenues, Ademir, Chico and player of the tournament, Zizinho.

Master tactician

Uruguay coach Juan López had been inspired by Switzerland's tactics earlier in the tournament. The only side to claim a point from Brazil had done so by dropping deep when without the ball. López instructed his side to do the same and the tactic worked, frustrating the home crowd as the sides went in goalless at the break.

The deadlock was broken soon after the restart. Ademir found Friaça free inside the box, who made little mistake in firing past Roque Máspoli. The Uruguayan keeper kept his head, however, and in a classic example of gamesmanship delayed the restart by deliberately arguing with the referee about the decision to award the goal. Whether he genuinely believed Friaça to be offside mattered not; Máspoli's intention was to wait until the crowd had calmed and the din had quietened before his side could offer their reply.

And reply they did. Driven on by their inspirational skipper Varela, Uruguay refused to buckle. Right winger Alcides Ghiggia outstripped his opposite number Bigode ("moustache" in Portuguese) and fired in a cross for Juan Schiaffino to equalise in the 66th minute. The Maracanã grew nervous, and their restlessness transferred to the pitch.

Ghiggia's heartbreaker

Uruguay sensed Brazilian unease and pressed on for a dramatic winner. With 11 minutes left, they got it. Once again it was Ghiggia, beating beleaguered left back Bigode for the second time, only this time he opted to shoot rather than cross. The power generated from such a tight angle surprised goalkeeper Barbosa, who, expecting another centre, was beaten at his near post.

Ten minutes later, the unthinkable was confirmed with the sound of English referee George Reader's whistle. The world's largest crowd fell completely silent, as disbelief swept the nation. Brazil's great day had finished in unimagined, impossible despair.

A national celebration had become a national tragedy. Even FIFA president Jules Rimet had been taken aback by the outcome, his congratulatory speech having been written in Portuguese. Instead he stood alone on the pitch with the trophy, all post-match ceremonies having been abandoned. Eventually Varela appeared to collect the trophy, Uruguay's second title, maintaining a 100 per cent World Cup record.

National embarrassment

For Brazil, the result would live long in the memory. Many of the shamed players disappeared into retirement, while Brazil's white jersey, labelled unpatriotic and cursed, was scrapped in favour of the now famous yellow. The term *Maracanazo*, coined following the loss, remains a byword in South America for a victory for the underdog.

Even a footballing nation that would go on to be the most successful World Cup team ever would never forget this one afternoon in Rio.



July 16, 1950, Rio de Janeiro. Uruguay's Alcides Ghiggia powers in the winning goal in the 1950 World Cup Final.

SWITZERLAND 1954

IN 1954, ONE TEAM WAS HEAD AND SHOULDERS ABOVE THE REST, WHILE ANOTHER WENT ON TO ACTUALLY BECOME WORLD CHAMPIONS. SWITZERLAND HAD IT ALL – GOALS, CONTROVERSY AND SCREW-IN BOOTS.

Here's a statistic for you. At the 1954 FIFA World Cup Finals in Switzerland there were 140 goals scored in just 26 games. That, for those without immediate access to a calculator, equates to an average of 5.38 goals in each and every game. Contrast that with the 2010 FIFA World Cup Finals in South Africa where there was actually five more goals scored but across 64 games at an average of just 2.27 goals per match.

Yes, while the standard of football in the last 60 years or so has evolved to become faster, stronger and undeniably more dynamic, the fundamental appeal of the game remains its ability to deliver goals and in Switzerland in 1954, there was a record-breaking feast on offer. Awarded the World Cup at FIFA's congress in 1946 at the same time that the 1950 event had been given to Brazil, it was a sound and sensible decision to have the World Cup Finals in Switzerland, not least because as a neutral nation, the country had been spared any of the destruction that most other nations in Europe had suffered in the Second World War and had less to do to make itself ready for the competition. Of course, it also helped that FIFA's HQ was based in Switzerland too.

Turning a profit

Switzerland in 1954 would be a World Cup Finals that broke new ground. For the first time, television coverage would help bring matches to a much greater audience while the idea that the World Cup could actually be a genuine money-spinner also began to take shape as Switzerland would, eventually, turn a tidy profit on staging the tournament.

Thirty-eight nations would enter the qualification process, all chasing 14 places, with Switzerland as hosts and Uruguay as holders gaining automatic places at the tournament. And while there would also be debut appearances for South Korea, Scotland and Turkey, the third and fourth place teams from the previous World Cup in Brazil – Sweden and Spain – failed to make it through to the Finals.

Matthews and Mortensen

Though England had won the British Home Championship in 1954, which, once again, had been used by FIFA as a qualifying group for the Finals, the sheen of invincibility



June 20, 1954, Basle. Hungary and a weakened West Germany line-up before their group game.



June 26, 1954, Basle. England forward Nat Lofthouse challenges Uruguay's Juan Schiaffino in the World Cup Quarter-Final.



June 23, 1954, Zürich. West Germany beat Turkey 7-2 in a Group 2 play-off after the two finished on the same number of points.

the team had once possessed had long since evaporated, not just because of the humiliating defeat at the hands of the United States in Belo Horizonte in 1950 but because their style of football had also been exposed by the radical and frankly awesome power of Hungary. In November 1953, Hungary had travelled to London to play England at Wembley and inflicted a stunning 6-3 defeat on an England team that featured household names like Stanley Matthews, Stan Mortensen and Billy Wright.

While it was England's first ever home defeat to foreign opposition, there was worse to follow. When the two sides met in Budapest in May 1954, just a month or so before the World Cup Finals began, Hungary ran out 7-1 winners. How big was the gulf between the two? Well, England's Syd Owen said that playing them that day "was like playing men from outer space". The result remains England's heaviest ever defeat in an international match.

Technically and tactically, England had been so far adrift of Hungary that it had brought into sharp focus not just how Hungary and, for that matter, the rest of the world were now progressing, but also how much England had to learn to try and bridge what was a surprisingly large gap.

The Golden Team

For their part, Hungary, were already reigning Olympic champions, winners of the Central European International Cup and were now heading into the World Cup Finals as the favourites and on the back of a 25-game unbeaten run. Theirs was a side littered with names that would, in time, become legends; Sándor Kocsis, Nándor Hidegkuti, József Bozsik and, of course, the "Galloping Major" himself, Ferenc Puskás.

But while Hungary arrived with their reputation preceding them, there would be other strong contenders in the chasing pack, including the holders Uruguay, a potent Brazil side and West Germany, back in the international fold for the first time since the end of the Second World War.

Today, of course, it's very fashionable for people to bash FIFA but sometimes, though, it's like they are actually seeking criticism. Take the format for the 1954 World Cup Finals. With 16 teams eventually qualifying for the Finals, it was decided that eight of the teams would be awarded seeding status and while having four groups of four teams made perfect sense, now each team would only be required to play two games each rather than a round-robin, with the two seeded sides, who had been selected before the qualifying competition even began, not required to face each other.

The confusion didn't end there. If two teams were level on points at the end of the group stage, an additional play-off game would now be played to determine which side should go through, irrespective of how many goals a side had scored or conceded in their two games. While the prospect of a possible additional game didn't sit well with the team's coaching staff, it was a system that was now open to manipulation and one that the likes of West Germany used to their full advantage.

Drawn in Group 2 with the favourites Hungary and second seeds Turkey and South Korea, they had opened their campaign with a comfortable 4-1 win over Turkey, at the same time as Hungary had obliterated South Korea 9-0 in Zürich. As West Germany expected to lose to the all-conquering Hungarians in their second game (and for Turkey to beat the South Koreans), they deliberately fielded what was, in effect, a reserve team for the match against Hungary, banking on another victory over the Turks in a play-off to secure their progress.

Sure enough, West Germany's second-string side went down 8-3 to Hungary in Basle, while Turkey, as expected, defeated South Korea 7-0. So while Turkey's goal difference was significantly better than the Germans, it counted for nought as the two sides went into a play-off to decide who would go through to the Quarter-Finals alongside Hungary. When the teams met once more, three days later, the West German side was restored to its full glory and cantered to a 7-2 win over Turkey, booking their spot in the knockout stages.

Goals galore

While the five games of Group 2 had yielded an improbable 41 goals, the other groups would also boast some fine matches, full of goals and open, attractive and attacking football. In Group 1, Brazil and Yugoslavia progressed, the former thanks to a 5-0 thumping of Mexico, the latter courtesy of a 1-0 win over France and a 1-1 draw with the Brazilians.

Uruguay were also joining in the fun in Group 3 with a 7-0 win over Scotland, including a hat-trick by Carlos Borges, and a 2-0 win over Czechoslovakia that saw them through as group winners. The South Americans would be joined by Austria, who also won both their games, confirming their Quarter-Final place with a resounding 5-0 victory over Czechoslovakia.

England – Quarter-Finals as usual

Group 4 saw England, still smarting from those defeats to Hungary, struggling again as they drew 4-4 after extra-time against Belgium, a team they were expecting to beat – and beat comfortably. It was a game characterised by some uncharacteristically sloppy defending from England and included a late own-goal by Portsmouth's Jimmy Dickinson that gifted the Belgians a point.

Order of sorts would be restored three days later, though, when a workmanlike 2-0 victory, achieved without the injured Nat Lofthouse and Stanley Matthews, over the host nation at Bern's Wankdorf Stadium carried them through to a Quarter-Final berth. To the relief of the host nation, they would be joined there

by the Swiss who battled past Italy in a play-off to determine second spot, winning 4-1 in Basle.

Twelve-goal thriller

Even without the supposedly lesser teams still involved, the goals continued to flow in the Quarter-Finals, where the line-up of teams looked and felt more like a world-class competition. Take the first Quarter-Final between Austria and Switzerland and one of the most remarkable matches ever played in the World Cup Finals.

Officiated by possibly the greatest-named referee in football history, Scotland's Charlie Faultless, it was a maddeningly breathless game, especially in the first half where the hosts found themselves three goals to the good after just 19 minutes, only to see their opponents storm back and score five in nine minutes to take a two-goal lead.

While Switzerland would pull another goal back before half-time to make it 5-4 at the interval, Austria restored their two-goal advantage eight minutes into the second half. Still, though, the Swiss came back, stealing another goal through Seppe Hügi on the hour to give them hope. A final Austrian goal from Erich Probst on 76 minutes, however, would bring this most incredible of games to a conclusion and finally end Switzerland's run in their own World Cup. Indeed, the only surprise was that the game was goalless for the last 15 minutes.

At the same time, England would meet the holders Uruguay in Basle in what would be just the second time the two nations had met in international football. If the pre-tournament matches against Hungary had exposed hitherto unknown weaknesses in the England team, then so too would a match against the reigning world champions. Not that England were embarrassed, far from it. Indeed, by playing to their strengths rather than focusing on their new-found weaknesses, they more than gave Uruguay a run for their money, and this despite going behind after just five minutes to an opportunistic Carlos Borges strike.

But with Stanley Matthews and Nat Lofthouse restored to the side after injury, England now had the kind of firepower that could trouble any side, irrespective of their credentials. As it was, it transpired that Matthews and Lofthouse would combine to bring England back into the match, Lofthouse firing home left-footed from 12 yards after some enterprising build-up play by Matthews to level matters on 16 minutes.

Though their industry was admirable, England would struggle against the greater creativity and guile of the Uruguayans, who took the lead again on 39 minutes when a 20-yard shot from captain Obdulio Varela beat the despairing dive of Gil Merrick.

Matters got worse for England straight after the break too, when the man bound for AC Milan, Juan Schiaffino, added a third. While Tom Finney prodded home a second goal for England after a goalmouth scramble, England's exit was confirmed 12 minutes from time when a low-angled drive from Javier Ambrois found the corner of the net.

Ref put to the test

A day later in Geneva, West Germany completed an uneventful 2-0 win over Yugoslavia, while in Berne, Hungary and Brazil were contesting a game that was anything but uneventful. With Hungary ahead 2-1, the game exploded into life as Hungary added a third from a controversial penalty on the hour mark. From that moment on, it was all that the English referee Arthur Ellis could do to maintain some semblance of order. Bozsik and



June 27, 1954, Bern. A fan invades the pitch during the bad-tempered Quarter-Final between Brazil and Hungary at the Wankdorf Stadium.


July 7, 1954, Bern. The West Germans celebrate after winning the World Cup Final, although Hungary were denied by a Welsh linesman.

Santos were ordered from the field for fighting as was Santos' teammate Humberto and the ill-feeling continued long after the final whistle. Not that Hungary really cared – they would go on to win 4-2 and book a Semi-Final match against the holders Uruguay.

The game against Uruguay in Lausanne would be the biggest test that the Hungarians had faced in international football, not least because the South Americans had never lost a game in the World Cup Finals. But it would be a test that Gusztáv Sebes' men would pass with flying colours.

Having taken a two-goal lead and apparently heading for the Final with few problems, Hungary, minus the injured Puskás, found themselves pegged back by a proud Uruguayan side clearly reluctant to surrender their title without a fight and when Juan Hohberg rounded Gyula Grosics in the Hungarian goal to equalise with four minutes left on the clock – his second goal of the game – the game headed inexorably into extra-time.

As the rain teemed down, the first half of extra time passed with no further score but as the teams tired, so Hungary found a new sense of purpose. After 109 minutes, the prolific Sándor Kocsis rose beautifully to head Hungary into the lead and then, seven minutes later, ended the tie with another exquisite headed goal.

Uruguay, the two-time champions and holder of the Jules Rimet Trophy, had suffered their first defeat at the World Cup Finals and Hungary, the Magnificent Magyars, had reached their first Final.

THE GERMANS WOULD ALSO BE WEARING NEW FOOTWEAR. DESIGNED AND MADE BY ADIDAS, THESE REVOLUTIONARY BOOTS FEATURED EXCHANGEABLE SCREW-IN STUDS.

Their opponents in that Final would be West Germany, a team that seemed to be hitting form at just the right time, their 6-1 demolition of neighbours Austria in the Semi-Final being a case in point. After the group game in which Hungary had easily beaten West Germany, Hungary would begin the Final as overwhelming favourites. The difference for this re-match, of course, was that this time West Germany would be fielding their strongest side and not one deliberately weakened so as to rest some of their key personnel.

Moreover, the Germans would also be wearing new footwear. Designed and made by Adidas, these revolutionary boots featured exchangeable screw-in studs that were ideal for the wet conditions.

Hungary too would be able to count on a returning star, as Ferenc Puskás declared himself fit to play in the Final, not that anything would have stopped him from appearing in his country's biggest ever game. For a team that had already scored 25 goals in just four games in the tournament, it was hardly surprising that the Hungarians started the Final itself in electrifying style. Within eight minutes they were already two goals to the good – one

from Puskás and one from the right-winger Zoltán Czibor and already the question seemed to be not if they were going to win the World Cup but rather by how many goals they were going to do it.

German engineering

But this wasn't the German side that capitulated so meekly in the group stages. No, by the 18th minute they were back on level terms as goals by Max Morlock and Helmut Rahn, capitalising on a mistake by Gyula Grosics, drew them level.

After the break, Hungary returned to the fray seemingly reinvigorated and were desperately unlucky not to score again. Hidegkuti struck a post, Kocsis crashed one off the bar and another shot was cleared off the line by Werner Kohlmeyer. Try as they might, Hungary couldn't break down the German's rearguard action and with just five minutes left, Germany got their own reward for weathering the storm as the tireless Helmut Rahn broke into the Hungarian penalty area and whipped a low, skidding shot past the right hand of Grosics and into the corner for what seemed to be the unlikeliest of winners.

NOT ONLY HAD GERMANY WON THEIR FIRST WORLD CUP, THEY HAD DONE SO BY BEATING A TEAM THOUGHT BY SO MANY AS BEING VIRTUALLY UNBEATABLE.

With time running out, Puskás, who it later transpired had a hairline fracture of his ankle, latched on to a through ball in the inside-left channel and as he bore down on Toni Turek's goal he slid the ball past the West German keeper for what had seemed to be a fantastic equaliser.

But no. As the Hungarians celebrated, the Welsh linesman Mervyn Griffiths flagged for offside and Puskás' "goal" was disallowed. It was a big call to make, especially as film footage suggests that Puskás was actually onside in the build-up to the goal. Moments later, the English referee William Ling blew for full-time and West Germany, against all the odds, had won the World Cup.

Unlikely champions

It had been a remarkable turnaround. Having been banned from competing in 1950 in the wake of the Second World War, the Germans had returned to international football in the most incredible fashion imaginable. Not only had they won their first World Cup, they had done so by beating a team thought by so many in the game as being virtually unbeatable. Today, Germans often refer to the game as *"Das Wunder von Bern"* (or "*The Miracle of Bern*") and while we'll never know whether there was any intervention from on high on that soggy, sodden day in Switzerland, it's clear that someone, somewhere was on the West Germans' side.

But as time would tell, it wouldn't be the last time that the Germans would figure prominently in the World Cup Finals.



July 7, 1954, Bern. Jules Rimet hands the trophy to West Germany captain Fritz Walter. Walter had narrowly escaped being sent to a gulag in 1945, after being recognised by a benevolent guard.



SWEDEN 1958

ALL OF THE HOME NATIONS QUALIFIED, WHILE FORMER CHAMPIONS ITALY AND URUGUAY WERE ABSENT. BRAZIL ARRIVED EARLY TO ACCLIMATISE, BUT WITH VAVÁ, DIDI AND PELÉ, HAD THE SKILL TO SCORE AT WILL.

Every now and then, a sporting event will produce a talent so prodigious, so utterly sublime, that the whole world sits up and takes notice. All too often, though, that magical and memorable moment in the limelight comes to nothing but at the 1958 World Cup Finals in Sweden it was different – and wonderfully so. It was here that a 17-year-old Brazilian striker – Pelé – made his World Cup bow and not only announced himself as one of the most gifted players on show at the tournament but gave the watching world a glimpse of a rare and unique talent that would come to dominate the game for the next two decades.

South America overlooked

Yet it was perhaps a source of irritation to South American nations that Pelé's first real foray onto the global football stage would have to be in Europe. With the World Cup Finals having been held in Switzerland four years earlier, it had seemed, quite reasonably, that the Finals might be taken back once more across the Atlantic but while the likes of Mexico, Chile and Argentina all expressed an interest in staging the competition, none could compete with the bid of Sweden, whose nomination was ratified on June 23, 1950.

Though there may have been some residual resentment from the South American nations as to the choice of host, there could be no denying that Sweden appeared to have everything going for its bid, from spacious stadiums and facilities to an excellent infrastructure. Certainly, the number of national federations applying to take part – a record 53 countries, up from 38 in 1954 – suggested that the competition had never been more popular, with 29 European nations, nine from South America, nine from Asia and Africa and another six nations from North and Central America.

Italy's failure

The 1958 World Cup in Sweden would also be that rarest of World Cup Finals where two-time champions Italy not only failed to qualify for the first time in their history – falling at the hands of Northern Ireland in the deciding qualifying match – but where all four of the home nations would claim a spot at the Finals too, with Wales taking their place as the winner of a hastily arranged play-off between a second-placed UEFA team from the qualification process (Wales) and Israel, the winner of the African and Asian play-off, the result of a convoluted and confusing process that had been beset by withdrawals.

What made Wales' qualification all the more remarkable was that they had already been eliminated, having finished second to Czechoslovakia in their qualifying group but had then been reinstated as the rash of teams pulling out threatened to put an almighty spanner in FIFA's plans for the tournament.

THE LOSS OF DUNCAN EDWARDS WAS UNQUANTIFIABLE. HERE WAS A PLAYER BLESSED WITH TALENT, WHO WALTER WINTERBOTTOM HAD COME TO RELY ON.

Having qualified with ease, however, England's preparations for the Finals had been curtailed by the devastating impact of the Munich air crash on February 6, 1958, an accident that had taken the lives of 23 people, including eight players from Manchester United, one of which was Duncan Edwards, England's 21-year-old *wunderkind*.

The loss of Edwards was unquantifiable. Here was a player blessed with a rare and talismanic talent, a gifted midfielder who the England manager Walter Winterbottom had come to rely on increasingly in his team. Certainly, his absence from the England squad was apparent in Sweden where, despite remaining undefeated in their group with Brazil, USSR and Austria, three draws left them facing a play-off against the USSR in Gothenburg for a place in the Quarter-Finals.

It would prove to be a game too far for Winterbottom and England, however, as a single goal from Anatoli Ilyin saw the Soviet Union, in their first appearance in the FIFA World Cup Finals, eke through at England's expense.

Play-off pangs

Though the format had changed slightly since the 1954 tournament in Switzerland so that each team now played each other in their group games, rather than just playing two games, the idea that play-offs would be used to settle any drawn groups was the source of some consternation for the teams, not least because for some, it meant playing a strength-sapping three games in five days.

Complaints were lodged and consideration duly given to changing the rules so that goal average would become the determining factor but, ultimately, it was decided by the World Cup organising committee that it would be unfair to change the rules mid-tournament. Put simply, the teams were stuck with the much-disliked play-offs.

Indeed, play-offs would also decide Quarter-Final places in Groups 1 and 2 but this time there would be greater success for the home nations. In Group 1, Northern Ireland, buoyed by a 1-0 win over Czechoslovakia and a draw with the reigning champions and eventual group winners West Germany, found themselves faced with a second game against the Czechs who had also won one, lost one and drawn one, to determine who would progress.

Again, though, it would be the Irish who edged this evenly-matched encounter, coming from a goal down in Malmö, with two goals from Aston Villa striker Peter McParland, including the sweetest of winners in extra-time.

Dragons on fire

Wales, too, would also advance via a play-off, this time against Hungary, the team that had held everybody spellbound four years earlier. Though the host nation Sweden had won the group with comparative ease, Wales and Hungary had finished level on three points and, as goal difference (as opposed to goal average) was yet to be introduced as a means of separating teams – if it had, Wales would have been out – it meant another play-off.

Despite starting the game as clear underdogs, Wales rose to the challenge and even a first-half opener from Hungary's Lajos Tichy didn't seem to throw them off their stride. Instead, they just came back stronger in the second-half as goals from the ever-dependable Ivor Allchurch and Tottenham Hotspur's Terry Medwin secured what was a remarkable win.



June 29, 1958, Stockholm.
In Sweden, Pelé truly arrived.



June 15, 1958, Solna. Wales hold hosts Sweden to a 0-0 draw in their Group 3 match.



Yes, this may well have been a Hungarian team that no longer had the likes of the legendary Ferenc Puskás and Sándor Kocsis in their line-up, but it took nothing away from what was an astonishing and famous victory for the principality.

But if the groups had seemed that there was little to choose between the sides – and there wasn't – the real fireworks of the initial exchanges would come in Group 2 with the six games yielding an incredible 31 goals.

The undisputed star of the show, meanwhile, would be the French striker Just Fontaine who scored a hat-trick in France's opening 7-3 win against Paraguay, two against Yugoslavia and another against Scotland in their third and final group game.

That awesome firepower would eventually see them top the group despite a 3-2 defeat to the group runners-up Yugoslavia, leaving Paraguay third and Scotland propping up the group.

The dream draw

Wales' reward for topping Hungary would be a Quarter-Final against Brazil, a team that had taken part in each and every one of the World Cup Finals to date but had, for one reason or another, failed to finish as champions.

Certainly, Brazil's failure to win on home soil in 1950 and then the defeat at the hands of Hungary – the "Magnificent Magyars" – four years later had left the nation at a low ebb. Despite this, there were few countries that could match Brazil for their natural aptitude and enthusiasm for the game.

At Sweden '58, though, Brazilian coach Vicente Feola had left nothing to chance in their attempts to win the Jules Rimet Trophy. His team had arrived in Europe well in advance of the tournament starting, familiarising themselves to the climate and playing friendlies against teams whose style mirrored that of some of the nations they would be playing at the competition. They even brought a sports psychologist with them. It was a disciplined and determined approach that was seemingly at odds with the free-flowing and flamboyant way in which the team actually played the game.

But it was incredibly effective. Under coach Feola, Brazil had become known for their radical 4-2-4 formation, a breathtaking, all-out attack centred around the boundless imagination of Garrincha, Vavá and the new kid in town, Pelé.

One of a kind

Born Edson Arantes do Nascimento in the small town of Três Corações (or "Three Hearts"), Pelé was a wonderful one-off, an effervescent, ebullient bag of tricks that

covered every blade of glass on the football field, the ball seemingly glued to his boots. Having made his World Cup debut against the USSR to become the youngest player in the history of the competition, he then became the youngest player to score in a World Cup Finals when his goal against Wales in the Quarter-Final proved to be the difference between the two sides.

It would be the kind of goal that, in time, we would come to expect from Pelé. Receiving the ball with his back to goal, he simply span round, taking the ball with him, before coolly knocking the ball past Wales keeper Jack Kelsey. The celebrations that followed were just as remarkable too, with Pelé following the ball into the net, pursued by most of his teammates and several press photographers too.

The other Quarter-Finals would follow form with the favourites all making progress. West Germany pipped Yugoslavia thanks to an early Helmut Rahn single goal, Sweden eased past the USSR courtesy of two second-half goals, while France would continue their ominous passage in the tournament, thanks mainly to the incredible goalscoring prowess of Just Fontaine, who bagged another two goals in a 4-0 demolition of Northern Ireland (who wouldn't be seen in another World Cup for 24 years).

Pelé and Fontaine

It left a mouth-watering Semi-Final line-up with Brazil (the only team from outside Europe left in the competition) facing the free-scoring French, while the host nation Sweden would be pitted against the reigning champions West Germany.

PELÉ WAS A WONDERFUL ONE-OFF, AN EFFERVESCENT BAG OF TRICKS THAT COVERED EVERY BLADE OF GLASS ON THE FOOTBALL FIELD.

In Gothenburg, the hosts, cheered on by nearly 50,000 fans in the Nya Ullevi stadium, would rally against a West German side that had taken a 24th minute lead from Hans Schäfer, to equalise through Lennart Skoglund eight minutes later. A tight second-half ensued but with nine minutes remaining, the Swedes went ahead through Gunnar Gren before the winger Kurt Hamrin secured a memorable victory two minutes from time when he meandered down the right wing, cutting this way and that, before beating the German keeper Fritz Herkenrath at his near post.

In the other Semi-Final, France and Brazil played out a lively and intriguing game in Stockholm but if Just Fontaine had spearheaded France's charge to date – and he would score one more in the Semi-Final – then he would be left in the shadows by the performance of Pelé. The young star was simply irresistible, an imperious 23-minute second-half hat-trick propelling Brazil to a wonderful 5-2 victory and into their first Final proper (the 1950 World Cup was a group stage, remember) from six attempts.

Lucky 13 for the Frenchman

But that would not be the end of Just Fontaine's incredible World Cup, not by a long chalk. In the Third/Fourth Place Play-Off match against West Germany in Gothenburg, the French would eventually emerge as 6-3 winners





June 29, 1958, Stockholm. Pelé congratulates goalscorer Vavá, who has edged Brazil 2-1 in front against Sweden in the World Cup Final.


June 30, 1958, Stockholm. Brazil coach Vicente Feola kisses the trophy.

and this time Fontaine, inevitably, stole all the headlines once more, as he plundered a further four goals to take his total for the tournament to a frankly ridiculous 13 from just six games. Though it was a World Cup record by some distance, it also made him only the second player after Uruguay's 1950 hero Alcides Ghiggia, to score in every game of the World Cup Finals. Indeed, it was – and is – such a phenomenal display, that it is unlikely ever to be beaten.

Another classic Final
The following day, meanwhile, Sweden and Brazil would contest the Final at Stockholm's Råsunda Stadium, a ground whose redevelopment for the World Cup Finals had been partly funded by the organising committee chairman Holger Bergérus remortgaging his own house to help raise funds, just so they could increase the capacity from 38,000 to over 52,000.

Certainly, all that extra home support seemed to make the difference when the game started as the hosts got off to a dream start when the Swedish skipper Nils Liedholm weaved his way through the Brazilian defence to cut a low shot into the corner of the net with just four minutes gone. But the lead would be short-lived. Five minutes later, Brazil were level, the ever-dependable Vavá sliding the ball home from close range to level the scores and then repeating the trick with an almost identical goal on 32 minutes to give Feola's side the lead.

After the interval, Brazil stretched their lead still further – and how. In a flash of improvised brilliance, Pelé received the ball at a difficult height on the edge of the Swedish penalty area, chesting it down and then flicking it over the head of a defender before volleying it low and hard past Kalle Svensson in the Swedish goal. It was the kind of moment of magic that captivated everybody that saw it but also the kind of turn that the football world would see time and time again over the next 20 years.

Worthy champions
When Mário Zagallo added a fourth goal on 68 minutes, the game, as a contest, was all but over and though Agne Simonsson would pull one back for Sweden, steering the ball home from 12 yards out, the last word, fittingly, would go to world football's newest star, Pelé, who on the stroke of full-time rose majestically to guide a header into the far corner of the net to complete a comprehensive and thoroughly deserved victory.

At the final whistle, Pelé broke down in tears as the size and scale of his and his team's achievement finally kicked in. It had been a huge burden to bear for one so young but he had carried the weight of expectation with all the confidence and maturity of a veteran campaigner 15 years his senior. A star had been born. It's also worth noting that in 1958, Pelé scored 58 times for Brazilian champions Santos .

Brazilian adventure is underway
It was a measure of Brazil's achievement that, to this day, it remains the one and only occasion when a World Cup staged in Europe was not won by a European team. It would, moreover, be the start of a World Cup journey for the country that would, in time, come to eclipse that of any other nation on the planet.

As for the World Cup itself, Sweden had been arguably the most successful tournament in years. Superbly organised and wonderfully presented, it had boasted some momentous and memorable moments and had produced an average of over three goals a game. It had, in addition, brought to the world a player who would, in time, go down in history as one of the true greats of the game and, of course, produced champions that were, unequivocally, the best team in the tournament. Pelé had arrived, Brazil, finally, were world champions and world domination beckoned for both.



CHILE 1962

AS THE WORLD CUP FINALS RETURNED TO SOUTH AMERICA, THE STAGE SEEMED SET FOR ANOTHER VIRTUOSO DISPLAY FROM THE REIGNING CHAMPIONS BRAZIL. BUT IT DIDN'T QUITE PAN OUT THAT WAY...

After the bitter disappointment felt in South America at missing out to competing bids from Europe and, eventually, to Sweden for the 1958 World Cup Finals, it was almost inevitable that the tournament would return to the continent for the 1962 edition, not least because had it gone to another European nation, then it's more than likely that there would not have been many of South America's top sides in attendance. After all, there was nothing that some teams from the continent liked more than a good old-fashioned boycott.

The only issue, then, was which country would receive ratification, and though Argentina appeared to be the overwhelming favourite to land the rights to stage the competition, they would face stiff competition from neighbours Chile, who, driven by their federation's key committee members Juan Pinto Durán and Carlos Dittborn, lobbied long and hard in a bid to bring the World Cup to their nation.

Surprise host

On the face of it, Argentina's bid seemed to tick all of FIFA's boxes. The stadia were all in place and were larger than those over the border in Chile, the country had a sound pedigree in the competition and, of course, the nation was insanely passionate about the game itself.

Despite the apparent superiority of the rival Argentine bid, however, Chile's belief that FIFA had an obligation to take the World Cup Finals to those nations that needed it most seemed to strike a chord and when a choice was taken in June 1958, the decision to award the tournament to Chile was as surprising as the margin of victory – the underdogs winning 32 votes to Argentina's 11.

When they had submitted their bid to stage the 1962 World Cup Finals, Chile had originally planned to use eight stadiums across eight different cities but the Federation's plans had been thrown into disarray on Sunday, May 22, 1960 when an earthquake measuring 9.5 on the Richter Scale (the most powerful ever recorded) struck the country, with its epicentre near Valdivia. While the casualties ran into the thousands, and some two million people affected, the effect on the nation's infrastructure was also significant and four of the stadiums earmarked for World Cup action, including newly-built ones, would be damaged to such an extent that they would no



June 2, 1962, Rancagua. England's Bobby Moore, Maurice Norman, Ron Flowers and Johnny Haynes are jubilant after defeating Argentina 3-1.

longer be suitable for use in the tournament. Though initial doubts about whether Chile could still actually host the event would be assuaged, the ruinous effects of the Valdivia earthquake would see only four stadiums – in Santiago, Viña del Mar, Rancagua and Arica in the far north of the country – now being used for the Finals.

A new record entry of 57 teams would enter the qualification fray initially, competing for the 14 places on offer (with Brazil as holders and Chile as hosts already assured of automatic places), although just 52 would eventually take part as withdrawals and rejections reduced the field.

Italy's easy ride

Aside from notable absentees such as France, Austria and the runners-up from 1958, Sweden, there would be few surprises among the teams making their way to Chile. Football superpowers West Germany, Hungary and England were in the draw, while two-times winner Italy only had to play two games, home and away to Israel, to claim their place. The other team in their group, Romania, pulled out before the qualification stage began. The 1962 Finals would also see two new teams make their bow in the event, as Colombia and Bulgaria also came through to take their places.

While the format had not changed – four groups of four, with the top two in each group progressing to the knockout stages – the only real change to the tournament rules would come in the shape of deciding ties in the group stages. Now, for the first time, goal difference would be employed to resolve any stalemates, although the only occasion it would be needed was in Group 4 where England's marginally better goals record would be enough to separate them from Argentina.

England's final game, a dire goalless draw against Bulgaria in front of 5,700 at Rancagua, proved sufficient to take Walter Winterbottom's side through to the Quarter-Finals (as runners-up to Hungary) and send the South Americans home. Still, at least it wasn't that far to travel.

The tedium of Group 4 would be in stark contrast to the action in Group 1, however, where the six games would yield 25 goals and provide some much-needed spark to the tournament. The best of these matches would come in Arica, where the debutants Colombia came from 3-0 and 4-1 down to salvage an incredible point in a breathless 4-4 draw.

Mind you, it wasn't just the goals that kept the crowds enraptured. In the hard-fought game between the USSR and Yugoslavia, for example, the Soviet defender Eduard Dubinski would leave the field with a broken leg after a horror tackle by Muhamed Mujic who, for the record, didn't receive as much as a caution for his part in the incident.

Organised and tenacious, the USSR would top the group, remaining undefeated, as Yugoslavia, thanks to a thumping 5-0 win over Colombia in the final game, took second spot behind the Russians.

Where have all the goals gone?

The feast of goals in the opening group seemed to buck the trend in the tournament as, for the most part, goals were hard to come by. Indeed, by the end of the tournament, the average number of goals per game – 2.78 – would be the lowest in the history of the World Cup Finals and also the first time that it had fallen below an average of three goals a game since the competition began in 1930.

In Group 3, meanwhile, the reigning champions Brazil eased through but in a decidedly more cautious manner, with just four goals to show from their three group games against Mexico, Czechoslovakia and Spain. Still, it would be enough for them to top the group, with Czechoslovakia's record of won one, drawn one and lost one sufficient for Rudolf Vytlacil's team to steal the second qualification spot in the group.

But the First Round's and, for that matter, the tournament's main talking point would come in the host nation's match against Italy. Though it was the first time the teams had ever met, tensions were already running high before the kick-off at Santiago's Estadio Nacional. Some overly critical and unfavourable newspaper reports of Santiago by Italian journalists Antonio Ghirelli and Corrado Pizzinelli had served only to inflame the local population, so much so that by the time the match began they had already returned home to Italy, concerned for their own safety.

The Battle of Santiago

You could see just how fevered the atmosphere had become within 12 seconds of English referee Ken Aston's whistle to start the game, as the first foul was committed. From then on, though, the game simply descended into a violent free-for-all.

On eight minutes, Italy's Giorgio Ferrini was sent off for a foul on Honorino Landa but then refused to leave the pitch and eventually had to be escorted from the field by the police. It would be the first of many flashpoints and you had to feel for Aston. Wherever he looked, there seemed to be scuffles breaking out all over the pitch. One minute Chile's Leonel Sánchez was escaping sanction for a punch on Italy's Mario David, thrown right in front of the linesman, but then, moments later, David found himself dismissed for a brutal and retaliatory flying kick to the head of Sánchez.

AS THE GAME THREATENED TO DESCEND INTO ANARCHY, SANCHEZ THREW ANOTHER PUNCH.

Then, as the game threatened to descend into anarchy, with the police on the field as much as the physios, Sánchez threw another punch, this time breaking the nose of Italy's Humberto Maschio.

Disgraceful exhibition

Somehow, and to his eternal credit, Ken Aston and his team managed to get the game finished without any further casualties, as the host nation emerged 2-0 winners. Later the game was dubbed "The Battle of Santiago" and as the players, or the casualties, left the field, it was easy to see why.

This most vicious and vindictive of games was still dominating the back pages (and some of the front pages) when the Quarter-Final matches began on June 10.

Fifty years or so on, it's intriguing to see how the schedules have changed for FIFA's showpiece event. Today, of course, the Quarter-Finals would be played over a number of days, with each game kicking off at a different time so as to increase the potential viewing figures across the globe. Back in 1962, however, when few people had televisions and football matches being screened live was still a comparative rarity, all of the Quarter-Finals kicked off on the same day at the same time.



June 7, 1962, Santiago. Ken Aston sends off Italy's Mario David in the 41st minute after fighting between Italians and Chileans in the infamous "Battle of Santiago". Italy's Giorgio Ferrini also had an early bath.

Buoyed by some fanatical home support in Arica, the hosts edged past the Soviet Union by two goals to one, all of the goals coming within the first half an hour while England, despite possessing a team and a squad that boasted household names like Bobby Charlton, Johnny Haynes and Jimmy Greaves, would be undone by the Brazilian brilliance of Didi, Vavá and Garrincha.

These three players were more than equipped to compensate for the absence of Pelé, who had been ruled out for the rest of the tournament having torn a thigh muscle in the goalless draw against Czechoslovakia in Brazil's second group game. While it was disappointing for Pelé to miss out on a personal level, it was perhaps even more so for the tournament itself, which badly needed a player of such ingenuity and creativity to help kick-start the event into life.

As for England, they would have to wait another four years for another shot at World Cup glory. Then, though, there would be a new manager in place of the national team and, of course, they would also have the advantage of playing the tournament at home. Then, expectations would be much, much higher.

The other two Quarter-Final games would be tight, close-fought encounters with little to separate the sides. In Rancagua's Estadio El Teniente, Czechoslovakia overcame a Hungary side that, after the glory years of the 1950s, were no longer the force they once were; a single goal by Adolf Scherer separated the teams.

Meanwhile, in Santiago, a late strike by Petar Radakovic just five minutes from the final whistle was enough to put paid to the brave challenge of Sepp Herberger's West Germany. While Radakovic had made his own little piece of World Cup history, tragedy would strike a little over four years later when the midfielder would suffer a heart attack during training with his club NK Rijeka. He died at the age of 29.

Goals at last!

The results would mean two Semi-Finals of contrasting styles, with one all-European tie between Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia and one South American, as hosts Chile took on the defending champions Brazil. To the relief of the organisers, the two matches would at last see some goalmouth action with ten goals plundered across the two games.

In Viña del Mar, Czechoslovakia rallied from a goal down to eliminate the Yugoslavians 3-1, with two more goals from Scherer and one from Josef Kadraba taking the Czechs through to their second World Cup Final. A goal for Yugoslavia's Drazan Jerkovic would tie him as the tournament's top scorer.

The contrast with the other Semi-Final could not have been more pronounced. In Viña del Mar, 5,890, turned up to watch Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, but for the



Switzerland's Peter Rösch and Eugen Meier. The Swiss would return home after losing all three of their group games.



June 17, 1962, Santiago. Brazil's Zito celebrates after scoring the second goal against Czechoslovakia in the Final.

June 17, 1962, Santiago. Brazil captain Mauro holds aloft the Jules Rimet Trophy after Czechoslovakia were beaten 3-1. It was Brazil's second consecutive World Cup win.

game between Chile and Brazil at the Estadio Nacional, there would be 76,500 in attendance, as anticipation and expectation reached fever pitch.

But for Chile it would be the end of a remarkable journey. Determined and courageous, Chile would do everything to keep pace with Brazil but the champion's class would shine through. Two goals down on the half hour mark, Chile pulled one back through Jorge Toro just before the interval, but once more found themselves two goals adrift just two minutes after the restart when Vavá restored Brazil's cushion. Yet if they thought Chile would lie down and die, they were wrong as an emphatic penalty by Leonel Sánchez near the hour brought them back into the game.

But it would not be enough. A fourth and final goal, a downward header by Vavá, would see Brazil record a fine 4-2 victory, which given the balance of play, was a fair reflection of Brazil's dominance. Chile's consolation, meanwhile, would come in the Third-Place match three days later as a 1-0 win over Yugoslavia gave them their highest ever finish in the competition.

Amarildo shows the way

Even without Pelé, Brazil were still a potent force and Pelé's replacement, Amarildo, would prove to be the perfect deputy. "Once I saw that Pelé could barely walk during the Czechoslovakia game, that's when I started thinking what it would be like to replace him," he would say later. "Under [coach] Aymoré Moreira there was never any doubt as to who his replacement would be. Every first-team player had a direct substitute and I was Pele's."

And so it transpired that Amarildo would write his name into World Cup folklore. Despite going a goal behind after a quarter of an hour – Josef Masopust latching on to a clever through ball from Adolf Scherer to score – Brazil were level within two minutes. Weaving his way into the penalty area on the left, Amarildo shaped to cross but deceived the Czech keeper Viliam Schrojf by firing the ball home at the near post instead, prompting mass celebrations.

With 20 minutes to go, Brazil grabbed the lead as Zito powered through the Czech ranks, drawing the defence towards him before setting Amarildo free on the left wing. Amarildo's cross, meanwhile, would be another inch-perfect delivery, finding Zito unmarked at the back post, who nodded home with ease.

The game would be all but over ten minutes later when Schrojf capped a Final to forget by dropping Santos' simple cross right at the feet of a grateful Vavá who prodded the ball into the empty net to seal another deserved victory for the Brazilians.

Who needs Pelé?

OK, so it was hardly vintage Brazil but in the wider scheme of things it didn't really matter. Here, after all, was a team who may not have played with the same fluidity and flair of some of their earlier models – a fact that was hardly helped by the absence of Pelé from their ranks – but was still more than good enough to beat the best that international football had to offer at the time.

In winning their second World Cup, Brazil had retained their title – the first and only team to do so since Italy won their second World Cup in France in 1938 – but while it had, undeniably, been a good thing to take the Finals to a new host nation, the resultant competition had hardly set the world alight as goals had been at a premium and a new circumspection had seemed to prevail among teams as they sought to avoid defeat rather than go all out to win.

Indeed, half a century on and people still look at the 1962 World Cup Finals and think immediately of The Battle of Santiago, rather than what Brazil achieved. That, in itself, speaks volumes about the quality of the tournament.



ENGLAND 1966

THE EIGHTH STAGING OF THE FIFA WORLD CUP WOULD SEE THE COMPETITION RETURN TO THE BIRTHPLACE OF THE MODERN GAME AND ALSO WELCOME A FIRST-TIME WINNER...

Given that the world's oldest federation, the Football Association, was still celebrating it's centenary, it seemed entirely appropriate that the 1966 World Cup should be awarded to England. Besides, here was a country that had given the game to the world, whose players were household names across the planet and whose fans lived, breathed and slept football. In England, football wasn't just the national game, it was the national obsession.

For whatever reason, though, England's undeniable passion and appetite for the game had never translated into success on the international playing field. While they were known and respected throughout the football world for the quality of their players both domestically and internationally, their performances in the FIFA World Cup had never really lived up to their billing. Famously, in their first World Cup in 1950, for example, they had lost 1-0 to the part-timers and no-hopers of the United States and found themselves on the long boat ride home from Brazil after the group stages.

By the time the FIFA World Cup finally reached England's shores in 1966, the host nation's record in the event wasn't the kind of résumé to fill opponents with fear and in the four tournaments they had contested, they had played 14 games, won three, drawn five and lost six, and the best finish they had mustered had been a lowly sixth in Switzerland in 1954.



March 28, 1966, London. David Corbett reveals the spot where his dog Pickles, a mixed-breed collie, discovered the missing Jules Rimet Trophy.

IN ENGLAND, FOOTBALL WASN'T JUST THE NATIONAL GAME, IT WAS THE NATIONAL OBSESSION.

Though the bare facts made for depressing reading, especially as England had given the game to the world, hope still sprung eternal in the green and pleasant land, not least because in Alf Ramsey they had a manager who was meticulous but creative, determined and adept.

They now possessed a squad that boasted some genuinely world-class talent, too. From the prolific Jimmy Greaves to the tireless youngster Alan Ball and on to the midfield maestro Bobby Charlton, here was a team that was tight, well-drilled and disciplined and who, with the support of an expectant nation, seemed set fair for the greatest challenge in the game of football – winning the FIFA World Cup.

Dog days

And yet there may have been no Jules Rimet Trophy to actually play for. On March 20, 1966, just three months before the tournament was due to start, thieves had broken into Westminster Central Hall and stolen the trophy from its display cabinet. A hunt ensued. Fingers were pointed, accusations hurled and hoax ransom notes were even delivered but all to no avail. Seven days would pass before the trophy was discovered, wrapped in newspaper and dumped in a hedge in Norwood, South London. But it wasn't one of the scores of



July 23, 1966, London. England manager Alf Ramsey prevents defender George Cohen swapping his shirt with the "animals" of Argentina after a bad-tempered Quarter-Final.

police officers who had been assigned to the task. No, it was found by a black and white mongrel dog, Pickles, who had been out for his daily walk with his owner.

With the Jules Rimet Trophy safe and intact (and Pickles lauded the world over as the hero of the hour), the build-up to the Finals continued apace. Expectation was high and certainly, England were genuine contenders. But if Alf Ramsey's team were to mount a serious and sustained challenge on home soil they would need to overcome some ominously strong opposition, such as the reigning champions Brazil, with the peerless Pelé in their ranks, Portugal, featuring Benfica's legendary hitman Eusébio, and West Germany, a team blessed with the likes of Uwe Seeler and the new star of world football, Franz Beckenbauer.

But England had a star of their own, a towering, talismanic presence at the heart of their defence that represented everything that Ramsey's England were about. West Ham United's Bobby Moore had won his first international cap in a warm-up game for the 1962 World Cup Finals against Peru in Lima and had impressed then-manager Walter Winterbottom so much that he had asked Moore to stay on and join the squad for the tournament. From that day on, Moore would be one of the first names on the England team sheet and when Alf Ramsey became manager of the national team in 1962, he wasted little time in appointing the young central defender as his new captain.

"He was my leader, my right-hand man. He was the spirit and the heartbeat of the team," Ramsey would say. "A cool, calculating footballer I could trust with my life. He was the supreme professional, the best I ever worked with."

Ramsey's ability to spot not merely talent and potential but also leadership qualities in relatively young players was typical of a coach whose ideas were considered revolutionary at the time. Though he appeared almost typically English in his manner, when it came to football Ramsey possessed such an unwavering belief in his and his team's ability that it bordered on the arrogant.

Indeed, when he took over as England coach in October 1962, one of his very first pronouncements was that England – his England – were going to win the World Cup in 1966. Though Ramsey could see no real reason why this wouldn't happen, only time, it seemed, would tell.

That leaves North Korea...

While there was experienced and well-organised opposition arriving in the country to challenge for the title, there would, however, be no African teams in England for the World Cup Finals. All 16 teams from the continent that wanted to participate would withdraw from the qualification process in protest at



Ticket for the final.

having to also play a play-off match against the winners of the Asian qualification zone just to secure their place in England. The mass boycott from Africa left just three teams from across Africa, Asia and Australasia competing for the one place on offer and when one of those teams, South Korea, pulled out, preferring to concentrate on their preparations for the 1968 Olympic Games, it left Australia and North Korea facing just a two-leg home and away tie to qualify, a contest that the North Koreans would ultimately win.

Nervous start

In a rare display of common sense, FIFA had decided not to change the format of the tournament from the one used in Chile. It was neat, sensible and easily understood, although England, initially, made hard work of getting through the Group Stage. In the opening game they laboured to a 0-0 draw against a Uruguay side intent on defending but eventually booked their place in the knockout stages with successive 2-0 victories over Mexico and then France. But the win against France would come at a cost, as Jimmy Greaves, the prolific Tottenham Hotspur striker who had already scored 43 goals in just 54 games for his country, received a gash to the shin that would keep him out of the next two games. Greaves' misfortune, however, would present the West Ham United striker Geoff Hurst with an opportunity and it would be a chance that Hurst would grab with both hands.

Joining England in the Quarter-Finals would be West Germany and Argentina from Group 2, both of whom won two games and drew one as they sent Spain and Switzerland home, and Portugal and Hungary from Group 3.

Portugal, in particular, had caught the eye in winning all their games and it was their mesmerising striker Eusébio that had set the competition alight, his angled volley in the 3-1 win over Brazil being the pick of his three Group Stage goals.

Holders fall at the first hurdle

Brazil's premature exit had taken most observers by surprise but their's was a game not really suited to the overly aggressive tactics that they would come up against in England.

Take their opening game against Bulgaria at Everton's Goodison Park. Despite scoring the first of his country's two goals, Pelé now found that his reputation as the pre-eminent player of his generation had preceded him. Kicked from pillar to post, he left the field bruised and battered and unable to play in the next game against Hungary, a game which they then lost 3-1. It was their first defeat since losing to the same opposition at the 1954 World Cup in Switzerland.

Korea prospects

One of the greatest stories of not just the 1966 World Cup Finals but of the entire history of the event came in Group 4 where the USSR, Italy, Chile and North Korea were drawn together. Little was known of the North Koreans when they arrived in England – the country was not even officially recognised as such by the British government – but when they left, everybody knew only too well what they had achieved. Though they were expected to be the makeweights of the group – and their 3-0 defeat to the eventual group winners USSR in their first game suggested as much – they salvaged a draw against Chile with a late equaliser and then, remarkably, pulled off one of the greatest shocks in history by beating Italy 1-0 at Ayresome Park and guaranteeing their place in the Quarter-Finals.

The Quarter-Finals would all start at the same time, 3pm, on Saturday, July 23 and while the Soviet Union continued their impressive showing with a 2-1 victory over Hungary, and West Germany hit top form, brushing aside an ill-tempered Uruguay 4-0 in a drubbing inspired by Beckenbauer, it was the other two games that provoked most reaction, albeit for vastly differing reasons.

At Wembley, England's last eight tie with Argentina would prove to be one of the ugliest and tetchiest encounters in the World Cup Finals, second only, perhaps to "The Battle of Santiago" in Chile in 1962. With Geoff Hurst in for the injured Jimmy Greaves, England found themselves on the receiving end of some brutal Argentinian assaults. The chief tormentor was the skipper Antonio Rattin who as well as diving into challenges also seemed to be waging a personal battle with the referee Rudolf Kreitlein so much so that by half-time the West German official had had enough and sent him from the field of play.

The trouble was Rattin didn't want to go and an unseemly melee ensued involving most of the Argentinian team and their officials that

eventually ended when Rattin was escorted from the pitch.

A Geoff Hurst glancing header 12 minutes from time, meanwhile, would settle the game and at the final whistle, as the players went to swap shirts, on ran the England manager Alf Ramsey to stop them. Later, Ramsey would even call the Argentinian team "animals", a statement that he was forced to retract by the Football Association. For their part, Argentina and, for that matter, Uruguay, went home complaining of a conspiracy to get them out of the tournament, pointing out that both of their Quarter-Finals had European officials in charge.

Meanwhile, in Liverpool...

Over at Goodison Park, the very real prospect of another stunning act of giant-killing seemed to be on the cards once more as North Korea sprinted into a 3-0 lead against Portugal within 25 improbable first-half minutes.

It was only the endeavour and guile of Eusébio, however, that helped Portugal extricate themselves from an almighty hole and his four goals, two from the penalty spot, followed by a fifth and final goal by José Augusto saw North Korea's incredible and almost unbelievable run in the World Cup come to an end.

If Portugal had ridden their luck in the Quarter-Final then it would finally run out against England in the Semi-Finals. It would be a terrific game, the best possible advert for football after some of the less savoury encounters of the previous round and there would be little to choose between the sides.

As it was, it would be two goals from Bobby Charlton, the first a coolly-taken side-foot finish after a rebound from the Portuguese keeper José Pereira and the second a howitzer of a shot from just inside the box, that made the difference.

And while Eusébio would pull one back from the penalty spot, awarded when the other Charlton, Jack, handled on the goal line, England would hold on to win through to the Final where hey would meet West Germany, 2-1 winners over the Soviet Union in the other Semi-Final.

Jules Rimet gleaming

Saturday, July 30, 1966. It's a date etched in the memory of every English football fan. With nearly 100,000 fans crammed into Wembley Stadium and an estimated 500 million people around the world watching the game on television, this was now a truly global event and one that had pitted two of the tournament's strongest nations, both undefeated, against each other.

England, perhaps feeling the weight of expectation, started cautiously and were first to crack when after 12 minutes full-back Ray Wilson's headed clearance could only find the West German striker Helmut Haller who wasted no time in returning the ball with vengeance to beat Gordon Banks in the England goal.

It was the wake-up call that England needed. Six minutes later, Geoff Hurst, still preferred to the now-fit Jimmy Greaves, rose unmarked in the penalty area to head home Bobby Moore's pinpoint free-kick and England were back in the game.

As the game wore on, England continued to press and were rewarded with just 12 minutes left to play when a Hurst shot took a deflection and sat up nicely for Martin Peters who steered the ball home on the volley to put England within touching distance of victory. But that sense of relief soon turned to despair. With a minute left to play and a nation gearing up for the party to end all parties, a



July 30, 1966, London. "They think it's all over... it is now!" Geoff Hurst blasts England's fourth; Wolfgang Overath can only watch.



July 30, 1966, London. England captain Bobby Moore holds aloft the Jules Rimet Trophy while wearing the now-worshipped Umbro second kit.



long-range free-kick from Lothar Emmerich ping-ponged around the English penalty area before rolling into the path of Wolfgang Weber who skilfully slid home a last-gasp equaliser for the Germans.

The sense of deflation was palpable and as extra-time beckoned, the shellshocked English team, who had been within a whisker of winning, were sent on their way with the words of Alf Ramsey ringing in their ears. "You've beaten them once," he told them. "Now go and do it again."

Russian linesman

They didn't let him down. With 11 minutes gone, England attacked and when Geoff Hurst received a low centre from Alan Ball, he swivelled and hit a fierce shot that rifled off the underside of the crossbar, appearing to cross the line before spinning back into play again.

In the confusion that followed, the referee Gottfried Dienst ran over to consult his Russian linesman Tokiq Bahramov who, even though he was some distance from the incident, confirmed that the ball had crossed the line before it had bounced out. The Germany protests continued but to no avail. England had a precious lead and this time they weren't going to surrender it.

Some of the crowd are on the pitch...

With just seconds left on referee Dienst's watch and some fans already on the pitch celebrating, Bobby Moore cleared his lines, finding Geoff Hurst free in the German half. Though he had Alan Ball clear and unmarked on his right, Hurst instead drove into the opposition penalty box before unleashing an unstoppable left-foot shot that fairly ripped the back of the net. Game, set and match to Ramsey's England.

That goal, of course, not only confirmed a famous England win but also propelled Hurst into the record books, as he became the first and, to date, only man to score a hat-trick in a World Cup Final. Much is still made of Hurst's second and England's third goal when, in reality, it didn't really matter in the final outcome.

Today, of course, Hurst, or rather Sir Geoff Hurst, can barely conduct an interview or make a public appearance without being asked about the incident. Had it have been the decisive goal then it may be understandable but it wasn't. Quite why so many people in the game still obsess about it is actually quite baffling.

Top of the world

England's victory, irrespective of dubious decisions, had certainly been well-earned. As a team, they had pulled off the classic trick of growing in strength and belief as the tournament progressed, culminating in that electrifying win over West Germany in the Final itself. Nobody could say they didn't deserve it.

As Bobby Moore clambered up the famous Wembley steps, pausing to wipe his sweaty hands on the velvet table top ahead of meeting and greeting Her Majesty the Queen, the look on his face said it all. Here was a man who had fulfilled his destiny and, as he held aloft the Jules Rimet Trophy, a player who had delivered for his country. That he was the greatest captain England ever had was beyond question. That he was never knighted before his death in 1993, aged just 51, was nothing short of a scandal.

Many years of hurt

But what of the legacy of England's victory in 1966? Well, you could argue that as well as being the greatest day in the history of English football, it might just have been the worst too. Ever since that day, the expectation that has accompanied each England team's appearance in the World Cup Finals has clearly been a burden that they are clearly incapable of shouldering and nearly half a century after that sunny Saturday at Wembley, England has still to replicate the success of the 1966 team.

Indeed, their World Cup record has been little short of shocking for a nation of its size and its supposed stature in international football. Since 1966, they have had just two World Cup Semi-Final appearances to show for their efforts and finished runners-up at the recent 2020 European Championships. Contrast that with West Germany and, more recently, the newly-unified Germany team. Since that defeat in 1966, they have won three World Cups and three European Championship titles. They have been runners-up on six other occasions and also taken three third-place finishes as well. That is a football superpower. That is genuine success.

Semi-Finals and an OBE

Today, England's players tend to return from a tournament after another predictable Quarter-Final exit (usually on penalties) to be lauded as heroes and if they reach a Semi-Final then it's street parades and a spot in the New Year's Honours list too.

It's a sad, sorry state of affairs and one that simply wouldn't happen in any of the other major footballing nations and while it was an undeniably glorious day and a remarkable achievement for Alf Ramsey and his magnificent team, England's victory in 1966 has cast a shadow that all England teams since have been simply unable to step out of.

BOBBY MOORE

If you ever visit Wembley Stadium, you'll see a statue of Bobby Moore greeting you as you reach the top of Olympic Way. Underneath it, there is an inscription that reads: "Immaculate footballer. Imperial defender. Immortal hero of 1966".

The skipper of England's one and only World Cup winning team, Moore was the beating heart of Sir Alf Ramsey's side. Always composed, always confident, he was a consummate captain, forming a formidable partnership with Jack Charlton at the heart of the Three Lions' defence as England took the title on home soil.

Four years after that heady July day in North London, Moore was again at his imperious best as he went toe to toe with the world's greatest player, Pelé, in England's World Cup group match with Brazil in Guadalajara, Mexico. While Brazil won a tight match, it was a contest that left an indelible mark on Pelé, who said Moore, "defended like a lord".

"Defenders would just kick me in frustration… but not Bobby, not ever," he said. "He would watch the ball, he would ignore my eyes and my movement and then, when he was ready and his balance was right, he would take the ball, always hard, always fair. He was a gentleman and an incredible footballer."

When he retired in 1973, Bobby Moore had won a then record 108 caps for his country, with 90 of them coming as the captain. And while his managerial career failed to scale the heights of his time playing – he had brief and unsuccessful spells in charge at Oxford City and Southend United – Moore's legacy as perhaps the finest defender that England has ever produced can never be questioned. Indeed, to this day he remains the man to which all English centre-backs are measured and, put simply, nobody has really come close.





July 23, 1966, Wembley, London. Bobby Moore leads his side out to play Argentina.

MEXICO 1970

WAS MEXICO 1970 THE GREATEST WORLD CUP FINALS IN HISTORY? AND WAS THE BRAZIL TEAM THAT TOOK PERMANENT POSSESSION OF THE JULES RIMET TROPHY REALLY THE BEST EVER? IT'S HARD TO ARGUE OTHERWISE.

There have been more spectacular goals and, indeed, goals of more immediacy, strikes where a spontaneous or audacious flash of improvisation have brought fans to their feet or all but brought the house down. But there have been few more beautiful goals than Carlos Alberto's goal in the Final of the 1970 World Cup.

From the mesmerising manner in which the ball criss-crossed the pitch, the Italian players unable to get anywhere close to it, to the final moments when Pelé, on the edge of the opposition penalty area, rolls the ball nonchalantly into the path of the goalscorer as though he were just warming up before a match, it is as pure and precise a football move as you will see.

And then, of course, there was the finish itself. Appearing on the right side of the 18-yard box, Carlos Alberto doesn't even break stride. He simply steps up and powers the ball, low, hard and true, into the far corner of the net, the force of the strike lifting him of his feet and his momentum carrying him off beyond the bye-line in ecstatic celebration.

It doesn't get better than this

Scored just three minutes before the end of the 1970 World Cup Final, it was a goal that not only capped Brazil's total dominance in the tournament but perfectly exhibited the beauty, imagination and sheer unencumbered joy with which Mário Zagallo's team played the game. It would be a goal and a tournament that would live long in the memory.

Argentina, always the bridesmaid...

As Mexico were already set to host the 1968 Olympic Games, FIFA had decided that they were best placed to stage the 1970 World Cup Finals and in 1964, they chose the Central Americans over Argentina, who had also lost out to Chile to stage the 1962 tournament. The South Americans would get their chance in due course, but for now Mexico, with its iconic



June 21, 1970, Mexico City. Italy and Brazil line up in the Azteca Stadium before their astounding Final match.

Estadio Azteca at the heart of its bid, would take centre stage.

Seventy-five teams would enter the qualifying competitions but there would be some high-profile casualties along the way, not least Spain, France, Hungary and the nation who would have been playing had they won the bid, Argentina.

This would also be the World Cup where a string of smaller footballing nations would begin to raise their games. Morocco, for example, became the first African country to qualify for the Finals since Egypt made it through back in 1934, while Romania reached their first Finals since they lost in the First Round in France in 1938. El Salvador and Israel would also make their maiden appearances in the tournament.

Bobby Moore jailed

As holders, England's place in Mexico was automatic but their preparations for their defence would be interrupted by an unsavoury incident involving their captain, Bobby Moore. As the team visited Colombia to play a warm-up game, Moore and his teammate Bobby Charlton had visited a jeweller's shop in Bogotá only for the skipper to be arrested soon after on a trumped charge of stealing a bracelet. Moore would spend four days in jail until diplomatic efforts and the small matter of little or no evidence, saw him freed to rejoin Sir Alf Ramsey's squad.

For all the cherished memories people hold of the 1970 World Cup, it's easy to forget that it got off to the most inauspicious of starts. After a suitably spectacular opening ceremony at the Estadio Azteca, the host nation Mexico and the USSR played out a tepid goalless draw where the only real talking points were the number of yellow cards handed out – it was first time they had been used in the World Cup – and the fact that the Russians had become the first team in World Cup history to make a substitution, when Viktor Serebryanikov was replaced with Anatoliy Puzach after 45 minutes.

Mercifully, the match didn't set the tone for the rest of the competition. Across the opening stages, there were, with the exception of Group 2, some entertaining and high-scoring exchanges.

Despite the sluggish start against the USSR, the host nation won their remaining two matches against El Salvador (4-0) and Belgium (1-0) to claim second place behind the Soviet Union on goal difference. In Group 3, meanwhile, Brazil got off to a flying start, despite going a goal down after just 11 minutes to Czechoslovakia. Stung into action, the South Americans lay siege to the Czech's goal, with Rivelino levelling matters and



June 14, 1970, Leon. Captain Bobby Moore leads his England team out for their Quarter-Final match against West Germany.



June 7, 1970, Guadalajara. England's Gordon Banks denies the Brazilians in the Group Stage. On the right, in Aertex splendour, is Spurs' Alan Mullery.



June 14, 1970, Leon. Bobby Charlton is followed by manager Sir Alf Ramsey, whose tactical blunder in the Quarter-Final allowed West Germany back into the game.

second-half goals from Pelé and a brace from Jairzinho, completing the rout. Perhaps the highlight of that game would be an audacious shot from the halfway line from Pelé that caught the Czech keeper off his line and very nearly found the back of the net.

The Brazilians would win their other two games to top the group but not without some difficulty, especially in the match against reigning champions England in Guadalajara. Certainly, it was an epic battle. Brazil pushed and probed while England, with the imperious captain Bobby Moore leading by example, defended resolutely and even when their ranks were broken, there was always Gordon Banks in goal to lend a helping hand. His save from Pelé's downward header, for example, was one of those magical World Cup moments that would live long in the memory.

Ultimately, it would take a lone goal from Jairzinho on the hour to separate the teams and at the end of the game, as Moore and Pelé embraced heartily, it was evident that here were two teams that held each other in the highest possible regard.

Goals were in plentiful supply in Group 4 too where there was an average of four per game. It would be the eventual group winners West Germany that plundered the most, with their deadly striker Gerd Müller scoring seven of their ten goals (including two hat-tricks). Peru, meanwhile, would claim the second qualification place by virtue of their wins over Bulgaria and Morocco.

Italy explodes into life

It was only in Group 2 where there seemed to be a dearth of anything approaching excitement. Here, goals were at a premium and remarkably, Italy would win the group despite scoring just a single goal in their three matches against Israel, Sweden and the eventual group runners-up Uruguay.

Italy's shyness in front of goal, however, would end in spectacular fashion in their Quarter-Final against the host nation in Toluca. Though Mexico took the lead early in the first-half through their experienced midfielder José Luis González, the Italians suddenly found their scoring boots and ran out 4-1 winners, with three goals in 13 second-half minutes, including two from the prolific centre-forward Gigi Riva, ending the host's interest in the competition.

The Italians would be joined in the Semi-Finals by Uruguay, who edged past the USSR 1-0 after extra time, and free-scoring Brazil who put paid to a valiant challenge from their neighbours Peru, eventually winning 4-2. The game of the last eight, though, would come at Leon's Nou Camp where England would meet their arch rivals and the team they defeated four years earlier in the final, West Germany.

Ramsey's disaster

There were some familiar faces on show, with both teams fielding five players who had played in the 1966 Final but with Gordon Banks waylaid with a stomach complaint, apparently caused by consuming a bottle of beer, Sir Alf Ramsey had called on the Chelsea keeper Peter Bonetti to fill what was an enormous void.

Initially, all seemed to be going to plan for England. Goals in each half by Alan Mullery and Martin Peters had seen England place one foot in the Semi-Finals but a goal by Franz

Beckenbauer on 68 minutes gave the Germans hope and, just eight minutes later, parity would be restored, as the veteran Uwe Seeler, playing in a record 20th match in the World Cup Finals, nodded home past a bemused Bonetti.

As the game headed into extra-time, England were on the verge of losing a two-goal lead for the first time under the management of Alf Ramsey and when the ever-ready Gerd Müller hooked home a third German goal in the second period, England's fate was all but sealed.

Four years of hurt

The shattering defeat, snatched from the jaws of what had appeared to be a clear and comfortable victory, would also prove to be the last international game for Bobby Charlton. Substituted for Colin Bell on 70 minutes, the Manchester United midfielder had amassed a record 106 caps and another record haul of 49 goals. Put simply, it was an England career without compare. Though the manager Sir Alf Ramsey had maintained that this was now a better squad than the one England had possessed in their victorious 1966 campaign, the unavoidable truth was that they were heading home, their reign as world champions over. Little did they know then, however, that it would be another 12 years before an England team took to the field in a World Cup Finals once more.

With the World Champions gone, the tournament was there for the taking and the only certainty that the Semi-Final line-up threw up was that the Final would be a straight fight between South America and Europe, as Brazil took on Uruguay and Italy faced West Germany.

In Guadalajara, Brazil recovered from going behind to a 19th minute goal from Luis Cubilla to eventually win 3-1 but, again, it was a moment of genius from Pelé that so nearly stole the show. Running on to a through-ball and faced with the Uruguayan keeper Ladislao Mazurkiewicz rushing off his line to challenge him, Pelé simply dummied the keeper allowing the ball to run past him before running around the other side of Mazurkiewicz and very nearly steering the ball home into the now unguarded net. It was another sublime piece of invention and further proof, if it was still needed, that here was the world's greatest player playing at the very peak of his powers.

European classic

Italy, meanwhile, appeared to be a team growing in confidence with each passing match. Gone was their defensive preoccupation of the early matches and in had come a more attacking and purposeful approach.

Their Semi-Final against West Germany would be another classic encounter. For 120 exhausting minutes, it was like watching two proud heavyweight fighters slugging it out, refusing to cede any ground. Franz Beckenbauer, for example, even carried on playing with his arm in a sling having dislocated his shoulder.

With the scores level at 1-1 after Karl-Heinz Schnellinger's last-minute equaliser, the game headed into extra-time and still the two combatants continued to trade blows;



June 18, 1970, Mexico City. German goalkeeper Sepp Maier can't hide his frustration as Gianni Rivera puts Italy 4-3 up in a mesmerising World Cup Semi-Final.



June 21, 1970, Mexico City. Brazilian star Pelé, with the Jules Rimet Trophy, is mobbed after his side's emphatic World Cup victory.

Müller pulled the Germans ahead only for Tarcisio Burgnich to equalise four minutes later. Riva made it 3-2 to Italy – his 22nd goal in 21 international games – only for Müller to reply once more.

No sooner were West Germany back on terms, however, then Italy were back in front. Straight from the kick-off, the *Azzurri* swept downfield and as the ball found its way into the area, there was Gianni Rivera, the vastly experienced AC Milan midfielder and the 1969 European Footballer of the Year, on hand to side-foot the ball past Sepp Maier and send Italy into the Final.

That's entertainment

Though games didn't come any bigger than the World Cup Final, this particular edition was given extra spice by virtue of the teams' record in the competition. Having both won the World Cup twice, the winner would, as three-times champions, get to keep the Jules Rimet Trophy in perpetuity.

These were two teams that were polar opposites. Brazil were a team laden with flair, flamboyance and a natural predilection to attack while Italy were the past-masters of defensive solidity. It was the unstoppable force against the immovable object. But something had to give.

Inevitably, it would be Pelé, a man whose irrepressible performances had come to dominate the event, who opened the scoring, his powerful header evading the despairing dive of Enrico Albertosi and giving Brazil a deserved lead after 18 minutes. Not that Brazil was a one-man team. In fact, here was a side with an embarrassment of riches; Gérson, Jairzinho, Rivelino, Tostão, Clodoaldo – everywhere you looked were players with the kind of God-given talent that most other nations could only dream of possessing.

PEOPLE WERE ALREADY CALLING BRAZIL THE GREATEST INTERNATIONAL TEAM OF ALL-TIME AND IT WAS HARD, IF NOT IMPOSSIBLE, TO DISAGREE.

Though Italy would equalise with a well-taken goal by Roberto Boninsegna, capitalising on an unusual lapse by the Brazilian defence before steering the ball into an unguarded goal, the second half would see Brazil move through the gears in scintillating fashion.

On 66 minutes, the effervescent Gérson unleashed a rapier of a drive from outside of the penalty area to restore Brazil's advantage, while a third goal bundled in by Jairzinho not only put the game out of Italy's reach but confirmed his place as one of the star players of the tournament. Indeed, his record of scoring in all six games of Brazil's World Cup Final campaign remains unmatched.

The beautiful game

Then, three minutes from time, that final flourish, courtesy of Carlos Alberto, and the goal that would come to typify everything that Brazil and their mouth-watering blend of attacking football had given to the watching world. At the final whistle, the Estadio Azteca pitch was swamped with fans and media alike while Pelé, soon relieved of his shirt, was carried aloft, his place as the world's greatest player confirmed once and for all.

It was fitting, too, that Carlos Alberto would be the last man to hold aloft the Jules Rimet Trophy and that his manager, Mário Zagallo, would become the first man to win the World Cup as both a player (he won it 1958 and 1962) and as a coach.

Though other teams staked a claim to the title, there could be no denying Brazil's pre-eminence in the 1970 World Cup. They had won all six of their matches, scoring 19 goals and conceding just four. They had, of course, won all six of the matches in qualifying for the finals as well.

Journalists and connoisseurs of the game were already calling them the greatest international team of all time and it was hard, if not impossible, to disagree. Indeed, it is a testament to their talent that every great international team that has trod the turf since has, inevitably, been compared to Mário Zagallo's side. The truth, however, is that not many teams really can compare to them.

INTERVIEW

PELÉ

AT THE 1970 WORLD CUP FINALS IN MEXICO, PELE, THEN 29, NOT ONLY CAPPED A GLORIOUS INTERNATIONAL CAREER BY WINNING AN UNPRECEDENTED THIRD WORLD CUP WINNERS' MEDAL AS PART OF THE MOST ENTERTAINING BRAZIL SIDE EVER, HE CEMENTED HIS PLACE IN HISTORY AS THE GREATEST PLAYER THE GAME WOULD EVER KNOW…

When I started out as a footballer, I never imagined I would become the only man to win three World Cups; I just wanted to play like my father. Now when I look back at all my medals it really brings it home. It's beyond all my expectations.

When I played in my first World Cup Finals, in Sweden in 1958, I was so young – just 17 – and when you are that age you don't really stop to think about what you have achieved. Then, when we won in 1962, I was so happy for the team, even though I had been injured in the tournament.

But for me the 1970 World Cup was the most important of all. It was the best of all, the most special. Why? Because when I played in the World Cup in England in 1966, I had found it difficult because people knew me by then and the only way they could think of to stop me was by fouling me. It was inevitable that I would get injured. I even thought about not playing in the World Cup ever again.

That's why Mexico 1970 was so important to me, not just because I had got injured in 1966 but because I knew it would be my final World Cup – and because I wanted to leave as a champion.

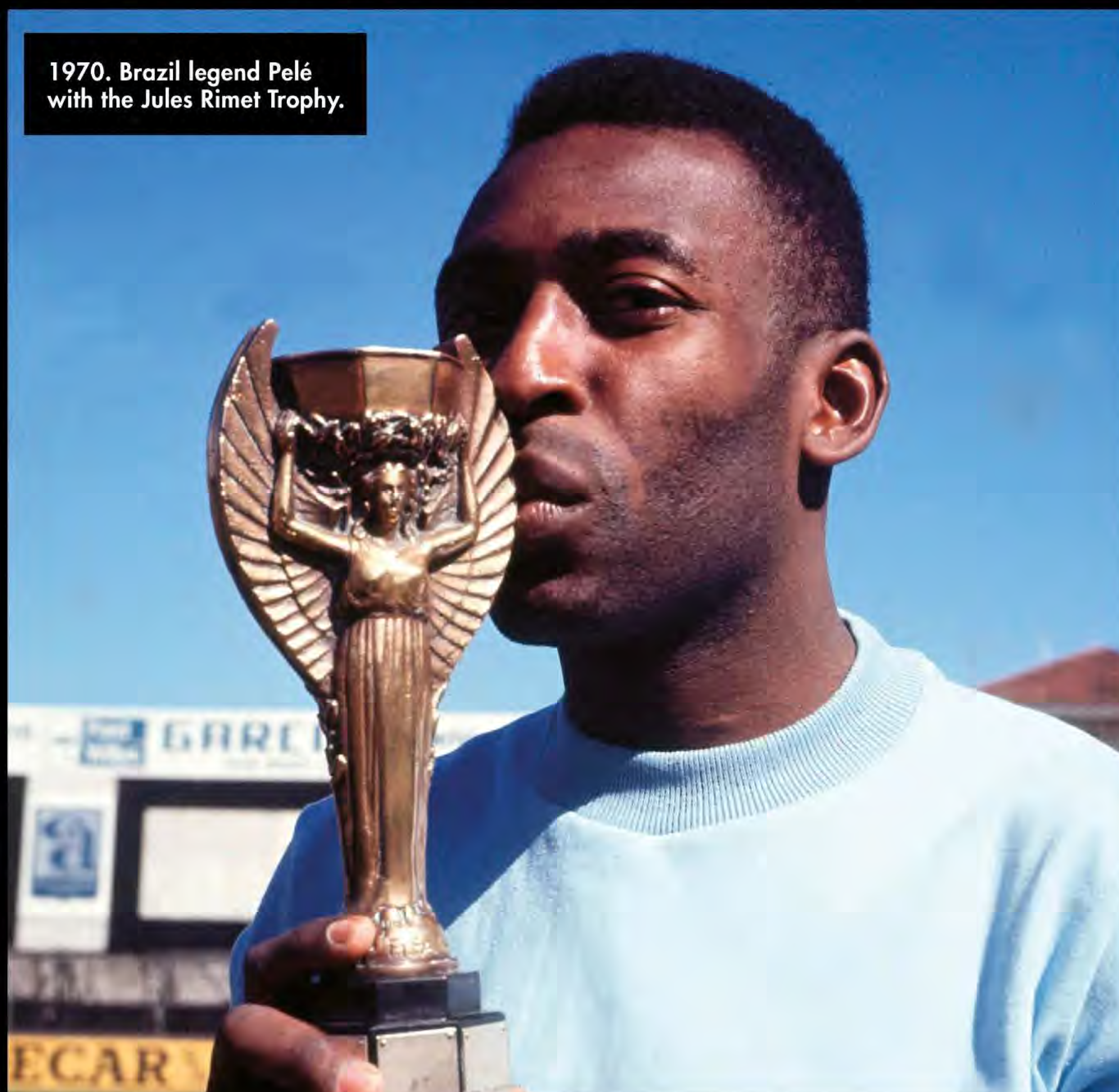
The World Cup of 1970 has so many fond memories for me and the Brazilian team but where do you start? It was the perfect tournament for us. For me, though, the highlight would have to be the header that I scored against Italy in the Final. I remember seeing the cross coming over and then the ball was in the net. It all happened so quickly.

But I also remember the group game against England as it was the toughest game we had in the competition. I have to say we were a little lucky against England because they were such a strong team, especially in defence. Their goalkeeper Gordon Banks made an incredible save from my header and my good friend Bobby Moore was always so difficult to play against.

Obviously, I was very happy to score in the Final against Italy but I think people perhaps remember Brazil's fourth goal more than mine. When Carlos Alberto scored it really was a beautiful goal, especially as we had worked on similar moves in training. When that goal went in we all new we had won the match. We all knew we had won the World Cup.

Many people, including FIFA, think that the Brazil team of 1970 was the best team in the history of all of the World Cup Finals and to play with those players and to be part of that team, I also believe that. As a player, it was such a joy to be part of such a special team. To win the World Cup too just made it all the more special.

People often ask me how I managed to maintain my motivation and that drive to carry on playing and winning with Brazil and I tell them what I tell everyone, that you play for love, not money. Everyone should do that. It's the only way.



1970. Brazil legend Pelé with the Jules Rimet Trophy.





W. GERMANY 1974

IT HAD BEEN A LONG WAIT FOR WEST GERMANY TO CLAIM THEIR SECOND WORLD CUP TITLE BUT WHEN IT FINALLY CAME – ON HOME SOIL AND AGAINST THE PURVEYORS OF TOTAL FOOTBALL – IT COULDN'T HAVE BEEN MORE SPECIAL.

A new era had begun. With Brazil now the proud and permanent holders of the Jules Rimet Trophy, it was time for a new cup to grace international football's premier competition and FIFA would receive over 50 designs from seven countries before they finally commissioned the Italian artist Silvio Gazzaniga to create a new World Cup. The finished result, called simply "the FIFA World Cup", would be made from 5kg of 18-carat gold, stand 36.5cm tall and depicted two people, arms outstretched, cradling the earth.

This time, however, FIFA also announced that no team would ever hold permanent possession of the new trophy, regardless of how many times they should win it. After all, solid gold trophies didn't come cheap.

Havelange gives hope

Change was also afoot at FIFA HQ where, three days before the 1974 World Cup began, the Brazilian João Havelange was voted in as the new president of the governing body, succeeding Sir Stanley Rous, and in doing so becoming the first ever non-European to hold the position as head of the world game.

Crucially, Havelange's election campaign had made great efforts in appealing to the associations and representatives from Africa, pledging that he would endeavour to increase their allocation of places at the Finals if they were to support his candidature.

Certainly, the idea that Africa and, for that matter, all of the Asian and Oceanian federations should have more places at the World Cup Finals was gathering pace as the heavy bias in favour of European teams was more evident than ever at the 1974 tournament.

With 33 teams from the continent taking part, there was a total of nine places at the Finals at stake for European nations to battle over. Contrast that with the plight of the teams from Africa (23 teams) and Asia/Oceania (19 teams) who both were given just one place each. Not that the disproportionate allocation of places seemed to put anybody off. After all, a total of 99 teams had entered the qualification stages of the 1974 World Cup competition and that was a new record entry list for the tournament.

But while change was in the air at FIFA, there were more pressing concerns in West Germany, the host nation of the tournament. Like their predecessors Mexico, West Germany had also hosted the summer Olympics two years before the circus of the FIFA World Cup Finals had come to town. But it was there that the comparisons ended. At the Munich Olympics in the summer of 1972, 11 members of the Israeli Olympic team had been kidnapped by the Black September terrorist group and held hostage in the Olympic Village. Within a day, all would be dead, as would five of their captors and a West German police officer.

THE NEW "FIFA WORLD CUP" WOULD BE MADE FROM 5kg OF 18-CARAT GOLD, STAND 36.5cm TALL AND DEPICTED TWO PEOPLE CRADLING THE EARTH.

Less than two years later, the World Cup would begin and with memories of the atrocity still fresh in the watching world's mind, security would, not surprisingly, be tighter than at any previous World Cup Finals.

Security concerns aside, there was much to look forward to at the 1974 World Cup Finals, not least because the team from the other side of the Iron Curtain, East Germany, had also qualified. But there were some notable absentees from the starting 16, including France, Spain and the 1966 champions, England.

England's campaign had foundered badly in a group they should really have won. Drawn with just Poland and Wales, Sir Alf Ramsey's team were the overwhelming favourites to progress from Group 5 but a combination of complacency and both Wales and Poland seeming to play above themselves saw England needing a victory in the final game against the Poles at Wembley to qualify.

But it would be a frustrating and ultimately fruitless night for Ramsey's men. England laid siege to the Polish goal but were denied time and time again by Jan Tomaszewksi, a goalkeeper that Brian Clough had famously labelled a "clown", and the final result – a 1-1 draw – would see the Poles qualify at England's expense. For England, it would be the first time since they had entered the World Cup fray in 1950 that they had failed to reach the World Cup Finals. For Sir Alf Ramsey, the man who had delivered English football's finest hour, it was the end of the road. Ramsey was sacked by the FA on May 1, 1974.

The demise of England and Wales in Group 5, coupled with Northern Ireland's third place in Group 6, would leave Scotland as the only qualifiers from the home nations, with Willie Ormond's team pipping Czechoslovakia by a point in Group 8 to go through.

There was, moreover, some significant tinkering with the format of the tournament once again. Though there were 16 teams in attendance once more, FIFA, in their infinite but more often than not questionable wisdom, had decided to do away with the format that had helped make the 1970 tournament in Mexico such a fantastic success.

Now, instead of a straight knock-out competition after the initial Group Stage, the top two teams from each group would go through, whereupon two new groups would take place, with all four teams playing each other. The winners of those groups would then progress straight to the Final, thereby negating any need for the drama of any Semi-Finals.

But if FIFA's tweaking and fine-tuning had many observers scratching their heads, the First Round Group Stage nevertheless threw up some intriguing match-ups, not least in Group 1 where the hosts West Germany had been drawn against neighbours East Germany.

Indeed, what made the meeting all the more delicious was that it would be the final match for both teams in the group and, as the games against Chile and Australia had been negotiated by both sides with relative ease, it would also be the match that decided not only who topped the group but who would gain perhaps the biggest bragging rights in modern international football history.

West against East

The game in Hamburg would be the first meeting in a full competitive international match since Germany was divided in the wake of World War II and some 3,000 East



July 7, 1974, Munich. Match-winner Gerd Müller retires from international football a deserved world champion.

German supporters were allowed over the border to watch the game. Despite the host nation being the favourites, the East Germans were well drilled, defensively solid and, in many respects, it would be a game that represented the East's own World Cup Final, such was the importance of the match.

DDR edge it, but West Germany profit
All of which made the result at the Volksparkstadion all the more significant and, ultimately, it would prove to be a well-deserved win for the unfancied East Germans, a late goal by the Magdeburg midfielder Jürgen Sparwasser being the difference between the sides. But was there method in the West German's madness? After all, by finishing second in their group they would, in all likelihood, avoid Holland in the Quarter-Finals and, as it transpired, Brazil and Argentina too. East Germany might have gone through as group winners, but they would have to contend with some of the toughest teams in the next round, unlike their counterparts from the other side of the Iron divide.

SCOTLAND BECAME THE FIRST TEAM IN WORLD CUP FINALS HISTORY TO BE KNOCKED OUT OF THE EVENT WITHOUT HAVING LOST A SINGLE GAME.

While the two German teams both advanced from Group 1, there was more agony for Scotland in Group 2 who won one game and drew two (including one against the reigning world champions Brazil) but still found themselves going home on goal difference.

Ahead of them was Yugoslavia, who had thumped Zaire 9-0 in Gelsenkirchen's Parkstadion (equalling the tournament record for the biggest margin of victory), and Brazil whose 3-0 win over the Africans was one goal better than Scotland's result and therefore saw the Scots unable to make it past the first stage once more.

What made it all the more galling was the Scots had become the first team in World Cup Finals history to be knocked out of the event without having lost a single game. It was precious little consolation.

But Scotland were not the only team to be eliminated by the narrowest of margins. In Group 4, for example, Italy, the runner-up in Mexico four years earlier, had also missed out by just a single goal, as Argentina edged them out of second place with a 4-1 win over Haiti, leaving the South Americans to join the runaway group winners Poland in the second group phase.





June 22, 1974, Hamburg. In front of 60,000 supporters, East German forward Jürgen Sparwasser scores the winning goal against West Germany, meaning that the DDR are the unlikely winners of Group 1.



July 7, 1974, Munich. No sooner had the Final started than Holland were 1-0 up thanks to Johan Neeskens.

The team to watch, however, was Holland. Under their coach Rinus Michels, the Dutch had introduced the concept of "Total Football" to the world stage, a system of play Michels himself had developed with enormous success at Ajax and one that had broke the mould of more rigid formations as it concentrated on greater freedom of movement for players wherein team-mates would fill in for those players who had moved out of position.

At the heart of their team was the incomparable talent of Johan Cruyff. Another product of the innovative youth system at Ajax, Cruyff had won six Eredivisie titles and three consecutive European Cups with the Dutch giants, as well as a host of individual awards including two coveted Ballon d'Ors in 1971 and 1973.

His success had continued when he moved to Barcelona in the summer of 1973. Though nominally a centre-forward, Cruyff's talent was such that he could cause damage from almost anywhere on the pitch, especially with his signature move, the imaginatively-named "Cruyff turn", a trick that could leave defenders chasing thin air as Cruyff himself motored off towards their goal.

Having breezed through Group 3 with almost indecent ease, the Dutch signalled their intent in their first game of the Second Round Group Stage with a 4-0 demolition of Argentina in Gelsenkirchen, with two goals from the scintillating Cruyff setting up another impressive win.

Their main rivals in the group would be Brazil, a team who had lost many of the fabled side from 1970 but were still, undoubtedly, a force to be reckoned with as their wins over East Germany and Argentina showed. With Holland also beating East Germany, it meant that the final game between the two would determine who would reach the World Cup Final.

Frustration for the Brazilians

As the Dutch had a superior goal difference than Brazil it meant that the South Americans needed to win to make the Final but it was clear that they had little answer to the invention and audacity of their opponents. As the match wore on, Brazil, somewhat uncharacteristically, resorted to the kind of tactics more usually seen in the wrestling ring as foul after foul rained down on the Dutch.

Eventually it became too much for the match referee Kurt Tschenscher who finally sent off Brazil's Luis Pereira for one infringement too many. Two second half goals from the Johans, Neeskens and Cruyff, would be sufficient to send the Dutch through to the Final.

In Group B, meanwhile, there was a similar state of affairs as both West Germany and Poland, who had rampaged through their group winning all three matches and scoring 12 goals in the process, went head to head for a place in the Final having both beaten Yugoslavia and Sweden. Again, though, West Germany held the advantage on goal difference and needed just a draw to ensure they went through. But on a sodden pitch in Frankfurt's Waldstadion, it would be the hosts who progressed, a single goal being enough to extinguish any lingering hopes that the Poles had of making their first Final

The Final, four days later, would start in almost farcical circumstances. With the elaborate closing ceremony complete, the teams had taken to the field only to find that nobody had seen fit to replace the corner flags that had been removed for the ceremony. With panicking officials scurrying around the

stadium trying to find them, the kick-off in the biggest match in football would be delayed by what was an unusually amateurish lapse on the part of the organisers.

Eventually, the corner flags would be found and the game would start – and how. Indeed, the first time a West German player would touch the ball was when Sepp Maier picked it out of the back of his net. A penalty awarded by the English referee Jack Taylor for a foul on Johan Cruyff by Bertie Vogts in the first minute saw the other Johan, Neeskens, step up and hammer the ball straight down the middle to give the Dutch an immediate lead.

The way Neeskens confidently dispatched the penalty, with power and no small measure of panache, typified the manner in which Holland had played the game throughout the tournament and if West Germany had thought that their opponents might have been intimidated by playing the host nation and appearing in their first World Cup Final, then the spot-kick was proof to the contrary.

Breitner marks the spot

Inevitably, West Germany, buoyed by some rabid home support, rallied and by the 25th minute they were on terms once more and again it was by virtue of a penalty kick. This time, it was Bernd Holzenbein that was hauled down by Wim Jansen and the resultant penalty, converted coolly by the hirsute Paul Brietner, made it 1-1. Interestingly, in nine previous World Cup Finals there had never been a single penalty kick, now there had been two in less than half an hour.

Müller's touch of genius

With half-time looming and the match delicately poised, Germany pressed, making progress down the inside-right channel and as the Borussia Mönchengladbach midfielder Rainer Bonhof whipped a cross into the penalty area, it was the omnipresent Gerd Müller who reacted first. His first touch, however, would let him down, taking the ball away from the goal, but in a sublime piece of improvisation he took the Dutch defence by surprise by swivelling and somehow steering the ball back into the net.

It was another act of spontaneity and brilliance from this most prolific of strikers and marked his tenth goal in the tournament. It was, also, his 14th in the World Cup Finals, a mark that eclipsed the previous record total held by France's Just Fontaine.

Total Football has no answer

While the Dutch would spend most of the second half desperately seeking an equaliser, the West German defence remained steadfast. Suddenly, the Total Football that had taken the Dutch this far seemed bereft of ideas as the hosts repelled any threat from their opponents. When Jack Taylor blew for full-time the sense of relief in the crowd was as tangible as the sense of disappointment in the Dutch camp.

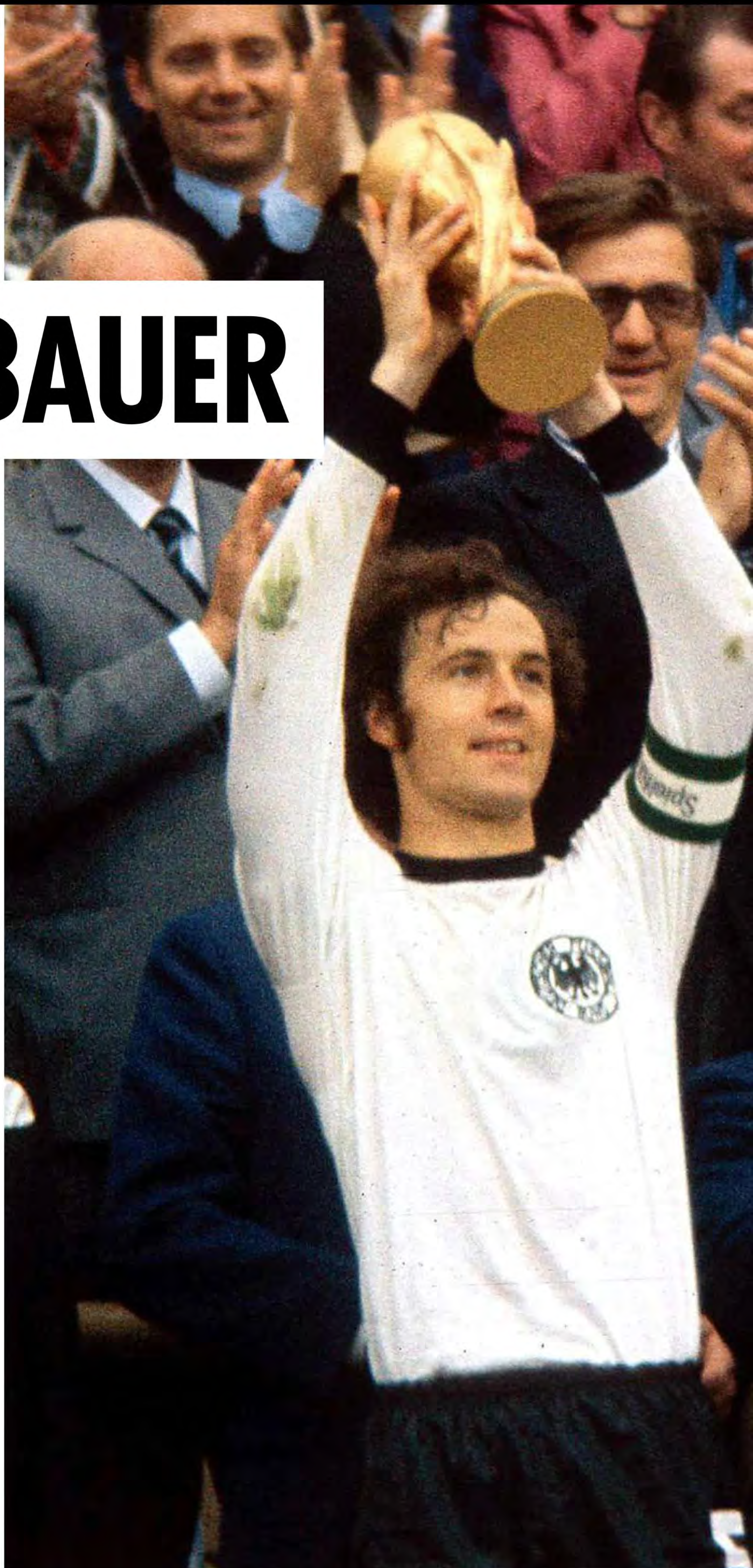
The Dutch, who had dazzled everyone with tactical innovation and potent attacking play, had fallen agonisingly short while West Germany, after 20 years of close calls and false dawns, had finally claimed their second World Cup title. For some of West Germany's players, like Gerd Müller, it would be the perfect way to leave the international stage, not just as a World Cup winner but as the greatest goalscorer in the competition's history.

For Franz Beckenbauer, meanwhile, it was the one title that his unique and abundant talent more than merited. Nobody could say he didn't deserve it.

July 7, 1974, Munich. A losing Finalist in 1966, Germany's illustrious Franz Beckenbauer finally tastes victory.

WORLD CUP ICONS

FRANZ BECKENBAUER



"Football," said Franz Beckenbauer, "is one of the world's best means of communication. It is impartial, apolitical and universal. Football unites people around the world every day. Young or old, players or fans, rich or poor, the game makes everyone equal, stirs the imagination, makes people happy and makes them sad."

Beckenbauer wasn't just gifted with words. Dubbed "Der Kaiser" (the Emperor), he was, quite simply, one of the greatest players in the history of the game. Often credited as creating the role of the modern-day sweeper, his style and sophistication, both in defence and midfield, helped West Germany become the world's best team in the 1970s.

Twice European Footballer of the Year, Beckenbauer's stellar career saw him win almost everything there was to win in the modern game, including captaining the all-conquering Bayern Munich to three consecutive European Cups (1974-76; the only player to do so).

But it was with the national team, Die Mannschaft, that saw him climb to even greater heights. Having skippered West Germany to the World Cup title on home soil in 1974, he then led them to glory in the 1976 European Championship in Yugoslavia becoming the first captain in history to achieve the feat.

Later, as the manager of the national side, Beckenbauer led his country to their third title, beating Argentina 1-0 in the Final in Italy in 1990.

It was the England legend Sir Bobby Charlton who perhaps best summed up the stature of Franz Beckenbauer when he argued that the German legend's reputation always preceded him. "The message he sent out was: 'Don't even try it. Coming out to face me is a waste of your time'."



7th July, 1974. Franz Beckenbauer holds aloft the trophy as his team become World Champions for the second time in history.



ARGENTINA 1978

AFTER DECADES TRYING TO SECURE THE RIGHTS TO STAGE THE WORLD CUP FINALS, ARGENTINA FINALLY GOT THEIR CHANCE IN 1978. BUT IT WOULD BE A TOURNAMENT MIRED IN CONTROVERSY, BOTH ON AND OFF THE PITCH.

It was only right and proper that Argentina, a nation whose passion for the game was as real and fervent as any other of the world's great football superpowers, should get the chance to stage the FIFA World Cup Finals.

Awarded the tournament at FIFA's 1966 congress in London at the same time that they gave the 1974 tournament to West Germany and the 1982 event to Spain, Argentina's determination to land the World Cup had finally paid dividends. But though Argentina's football credentials could not be disputed, the wider political and socioeconomic situation within the country would provoke widespread concern among FIFA members and in the 12 years that passed between the awarding of the World Cup and the staging of it, there would be massive upheaval in the country.

Dirty War

Governed by General Jorge Videla and his military junta, Argentina's selection as World Cup hosts had caused consternation among human rights activists who had long viewed the regime for being responsible for a wide range of offences, from extrajudicial murders to the forced "disappearance" of dissidents and even the kidnap of babies born by those mothers held at their detention centres.

So while the World Cup represented a high-profile opportunity for activists to expose the darker and more brutal side of the administration, it also provided a chance for Videla to clamp down even harder on any protests just in case it may embarrass the country with the whole world watching. An example of just how volatile the situation was came when Omar Actis, a retired general and the president of the local World Cup organising committee, was gunned down by guerrillas claiming to be from the Revolutionary Mononero Army in August 1976. Soon after, state forces executed 30 people in reprisal.

International retirements

Certainly, the political situation in Argentina was such that several of the world's greatest players even decided to bow out of international football either on moral grounds or simply to avoid the risk of playing in Argentina; West Germany's Paul Breitner and Holland's superstar Johan Cruyff being the two most notable. Others, like Breitner's teammate Franz Beckenbauer, for example, had already

June 1978. Scotland's Tartan Army

called time on their international career, heading off to the United States to play in the fledgling North American Soccer League, alongside Pelé at the New York Cosmos.

Not that it deterred the world's football community from taking part as a record number of initial entrants, 106, was proof that the tournament still had pulling power even when concomitant concerns about safety and security were so rife. Yet there would be some high-profile absentees from Argentina and not because of any moral objection to playing there.

England, ditched by their manager Don Revie as the campaign petered out, failed to qualify for the second Finals in succession, losing out to Italy, while the new European champions Czechoslovakia, the USSR and Yugoslavia also failed to negotiate their qualifying groups. That said, there were more than enough quality sides ready, willing and able to take their places in Argentina with Hungary, France and Spain back at the Finals for the first time since 1966 and Austria returning after a 20-year absence. There would also be World Cup debut appearances for Iran and Tunisia.

When the World Cup finally began on June 1, 1978, General Videla announced to the world that it would be played "under the sign of peace" and, for the most part, it would be an event that passed off without incident. Argentina, coached by the chain-smoking and left-leaning César Luis Menotti, was a side now focused on a style of play, *La Nuestra*, that owed more to slick movement and quick passing rather than the physical and more combative tactics employed by the national team in previous years. Menotti's dedication and belief in his system was such that he refused to pick any players from Boca Juniors simply because the negative manner in which they played the game was entirely at odds with his footballing philosophy.

But it was the omission of 17-year-old Diego Maradona that raised most eyebrows in the country and the wider world. A first team player for Argentinos Juniors at 15 and given his full international debut at 16 by Menotti when he picked him to play against Hungary in 1977, it was assumed the prodigious midfielder would be part of Argentina's squad for the World Cup. Instead, his place went to Oscar Ortiz.

Ally's Tartan Army

Of the home nations, only Scotland would make the trip to South America, sealing their place with a 2-0 win over Wales at Anfield in October 1977. They had arrived with manager Ally McLeod confidently proclaiming that his team were going to return home triumphant. Even their official World Cup song declared that *"We'll really shake 'em up, when we win the World Cup/'Cos Scotland are the greatest football team"*. You had to admire his confidence, even if it was a little misguided. Certainly, Scotland had some terrific players in their ranks – Joe Jordan, Graeme Souness, Asa Hartford and, of course, the incomparable Kenny Dalglish – but they weren't exactly one of the pre-tournament favourites.

Harsh reality

While Ally McLeod was adept at talking the talk, his Scotland side soon showed they weren't quite up to walking the walk and in their first game they crashed to a 3-1 defeat against Peru in Córdoba in front ot 37,927, the mercurial Teófilo Cubillas scoring twice for the South Americans.

Though they were criticised for the defeat to Peru, there was no real shame in losing to the South Americans, not least because this was a side that alongside Brazil had taken only one of two automatic qualification spots in the South American CONMEBOL region. But what followed proved to be another setback for the Scots. In the wake of the Peru game, their winger Willie Johnston tested positive

for a banned substance contained in his hay-fever medication and was immediately expelled from the competition, a decision that also ended his international career after 22 appearances.

Worse was to follow. In their next match against Iran, a game they were expected to easily win, they could only muster a 1-1 draw. It left Ally McLeod's men needing to beat Holland, the runners-up from 1974, by three clear goals in order to make it through to the next round.

It was a tall order and yet one that Scotland so very nearly pulled off. While it proved to be a famous victory, not least because of one of the goals of the tournament by Archie Gemmill who weaved his way this way and that before casually clipping the ball over Jan Jongbloed in the Dutch goal, it would amount to nought for the plucky Scots.

At one stage, Scotland were 3-1 up and pressing for a fourth that would have sent them through, somewhat improbably, to the next round on goal difference. As it was, it was Johnny Rep who finally put paid to Scotland's hopes and his goal in the 71st minute finally extinguished any lingering hope that the Tartan Army – Ally's Army – had of staying in the competition.

European advancement

While Scotland's demise ended any interest that the United Kingdom had in the 1978 World Cup, there was still considerable success for other European teams.

Italy topped Group 1, winning all of their three games and leaving hosts Argentina to take second place. In Group 2, Poland and West Germany qualified in first and second, while in Group 3, unfancied Austria, with their prolific striker Hans Krankl in fine form, won the group ahead of an out of sorts Brazil, who, after two draws in their opening games against Sweden and Spain, had to beat the Austrians to ensure they remained in the tournament.

The game against Sweden would prove to have added significance for Brazil as the tournament unravelled. With the scores tied at 1-1, the South Americans won a corner with time almost up. But as the kick was taken, Welsh referee Clive Thomas blew for full-time just as the ball was in mid-air, a split second before midfielder Zico headed the ball into the back of the net.

Despite their protestations, the goal would not stand and though they would advance, the fact that Brazil had missed out on what would have been an extra point, and therefore top place in Group 3, would come back to haunt them later in the tournament.

Second Round clash of the titans

For once, it seemed as though a European team may finally have a realistic chance of winning the World Cup outside of their own continent, especially with the traditionally strong South American nations like Brazil and Argentina failing to impress in the early exchanges.

Eight teams would advance into the Second Round group stages – the same, slightly unsatisfactory format that was used in West Germany in 1974 – and the way in which the groups had panned out made for some fascinating matches. Group A, for example, would be an exclusively European affair with Italy, Holland, Austria and the reigning champions West Germany playing for a place in the Semi-Final. In the other group, meanwhile, all but Poland would hail from South America, with Peru joining the hosts and Brazil.

As Italy and West Germany were grinding out a goalless draw in Buenos Aires, Holland signalled their intent with a devastating win over Austria, Johnny Rep scoring twice in a rampant 5-1 victory. After such an impressive



June 1, 1978, Buenos Aires. West Germany and Poland play out a goalless draw – both would qualify from the first group stages.




June 11, 1978, Mendoza. Archie Gemmill puts Scotland 3-1 up against the Netherlands, but sadly it wouldn't be enough to progress to the next round.

start, the rest of Group A were now playing catch-up to Ernst Happel's blossoming Dutch side. In the Second Round, Italy pipped the Austrians by a lone goal, while Holland twice came from behind against a determined West Germany to claim a point in a 2-2 draw.

With Austria out and West Germany teetering on the brink of elimination, the final round of games saw the place in the Final come down to a straight shoot-out between Holland and Italy and after a goal at both ends by Holland's Ernie Brandts, it would take one of the most spectacular goals of the tournament to separate the sides.

With just a quarter of an hour to go before extra-time, the Dutch defender Arie Haan picked up the ball just inside the Italian half and after setting into a charge, hammered the ball home from 40 yards, the ball clipping the post as it ripped past Dino Zoff in the Italian goal and smashed into the back of the net. It was a goal that defied belief and, for that matter, most of the laws of physics too, and one that was more than worthy of winning the World Cup itself.

Brazil hit form

As it was, Holland had reached their second successive World Cup Final. The only issue was who would emerge from Group B to face them. Brazil, of course, had timed their run to perfection, saving their best form for the latter stages of the tournament and their opening 3-0 win over Peru was as comprehensive as it was enthralling.

Not to be outdone, Argentina also won their first game later that day, with Mario Kempes, the tousle-haired Valencia striker – and only foreign-based player in their squad – scoring both goals in a 2-0 victory over Poland. A tense goalless draw against Brazil would follow for Menotti's side four days later in Rosario, a result that made the final group games for Argentina and Brazil all-important in their quest to make the Final.

Six of the best?

Crucially, Argentina's final Second Round group game against Peru would kick off a few hours after Brazil's final match, meaning that the hosts would know exactly what they would need to do to make the Final. With Brazil's 3-1 victory over Poland giving them five points from their three games and a very healthy goal difference of +5, it left Argentina needing to beat the Peruvians by four clear goals to go through at Brazil's expense.



25 June 1978, Buenos Aires. Argentinian midfielder Mario Kempes celebrates his second goal, arriving in extra time. This was Kempes' sixth goal – and the Golden Boot was his. Ten minutes later, Daniel Bertoni, also in this photograph, would make it 3-1.

That Argentina won the game was not, in itself, remarkable. That they won it 6-0 and with Peru barely bothering to contest the game, however, would come to tarnish the entire reputation of the tournament. While Argentina celebrated, conspiracy theories soon began to sweep around the tournament about the legitimacy of the result and however you examined it, it was suspect at best, not least because the two final games in Group A had kicked off at the same time so that no side would gain an advantage.

In 2012, a Peruvian senator, Genaro Ledesma, claimed that the Peruvian team had thrown the game as part of a murky deal cooked up by Argentina's ruling military junta and the then government of Peru. In fact, Ledesma even proposed that the result of the 1978 World Cup should even be annulled, such was the high level of corruption surrounding the proceedings.

THE ESTADIO MONUMENTAL WAS SHOWERED WITH A DELUGE OF TICKERTAPE AND RIBBONS, BLANKETING THE PITCH AND CAUSING A HEADACHE FOR THE STADIUM CLEANERS.

While debate raged and the accusations flew this way and that, the result would nevertheless stand and Argentina's place in the Final was assured. Brazil, meanwhile, were now out of the tournament, eliminated in the ugliest and most unsavoury manner imaginable and with their claims to be the tournament's moral victors landing on largely deaf ears.

Delay tactics

Four days later, the 1978 World Cup Final began in the most spectacular manner. In scenes never witnessed before, the Estadio Monumental was showered with a deluge of tickertape and ribbons, blanketing the pitch and causing a headache for the stadium cleaners. But it wouldn't be the litter that caused a delay to the kick-off.

As the teams took to the field, Argentina's players and staff mounted a protest against a cast that Dutch winger René van de Kerkhof had on his forearm, arguing that the dressing could prove dangerous to players. It seemed petty but this was an Argentine side under the most enormous pressure to win – especially



June 25, 1978, Buenos Aires. Tickertape rains down onto the Estadio Monumental pitch ahead of the Final.

after the hullabaloo of the Peru game – and if they could eke out any advantage they most certainly would. Discussions turned into arguments and arguments almost turned into a walk-off from the Dutch side.

Eventually, a compromise was reached whereby Van de Kerkhof was sent back to the dressing room to apply an additional layer of padding to the bandage, even though he had actually worn the same plaster in all of Holland's previous five games without incident or protest.

Fever pitch

The delay merely served to intensify the already emotional atmosphere in the Estadio Monumental, which was packed with 71,483 supporters. With the pitch still littered with tickertape, the teams got the game underway.

The hosts would settle into the game better than their European opponents and their industry would be rewarded when, in the 38th minute, Mario Kempes, the striker who had suddenly found his form in the latter stages of the tournament, slid home the opening goal. Faced with back-to-back defeats in the World Cup Final, Holland rallied in the second half and with just eight minutes remaining they drew level when a René van de Kerkhof cross was met with a bullet header from the substitute Dick Nanninga. Then, with seconds left on the clock, Robbie Rensenbrink, Holland's most prolific marksmen in the tournament, wriggled free in the penalty area to flick the ball past Ubaldo Fillol, only to see the ball come back off the post.

HOLLAND'S UNIQUE BRAND OF TOTAL FOOTBALL HAD TAKEN THEM TO THE BRINK OF SUCCESS BUT AGAIN THEY HAD FALLEN AT THE FINAL HURDLE.

It would be Holland's last chance. Come extra-time, it was Argentina, galvanised by some fanatical home support, that edged ahead when Kempes ghosted through the Dutch defence, prodding the ball home when it fell kindly for him after his shot was saved, a goal that would also win him the Golden Boot award and the Golden Ball prize for the tournament's best player.

When Daniel Bertoni broke through and crashed in a third goal five minutes from the final whistle, the World Cup was Argentina's and Cesar Luis Menotti lit another cigarette in celebration.

Don't cry for me Total Football

Having lost in 1974 and now coming within the width of a post of winning in 1978, the Dutch were crestfallen. Their unique brand of Total Football, a style so widely admired and respected, had taken them to the brink of the success its exponents undoubtedly deserved but again they had fallen at the final hurdle.

While it was tough on the Dutch, there was a huge sigh of relief accompanying the wild celebrations that continued across the country. For almost half a century, Argentina had been trying to win football's premier event but now, finally, they had managed to shed the tag of the Best Team Never To Win The World Cup. Instead, they passed that particular baton on to Holland.



SPAIN 1982

SHOCKING UPSETS AND RECORD WINS, CLASSIC ENCOUNTERS AND CONTROVERSIAL MOMENTS – SPAIN 1982 WAS A ROLLERCOASTER OF A WORLD CUP WHERE ANYTHING COULD HAPPEN… AND USUALLY DID.

That the World Cup was growing ever larger and, indeed, more popular was indisputable. A record number of countries – 108 from FIFA's then membership of 147 – now entered the qualification stages with 22 places up for grabs across the world. With hosts Spain and reigning champions Argentina already assured of their spots, the total of 24 national teams at the Finals would also make it the biggest in the competition's history, not least because there was now additional allocation for those teams in Asia and Africa.

In Europe, qualification for the Finals threw up few surprises, save for the elimination of Holland, the team that had been runner-up in the previous two World Cups.

Group 1 saw perennial contenders West Germany and their neighbours Austria take the two places, while in Group 7 it was Poland who, like West Germany, achieved a 100 per cent record to claim their berth. Elsewhere, there was a familiarity and inevitability about the identity of the qualifiers; France, Belgium, USSR, Czechoslovakia – these were all nations with a track record in the event.

Italy, with their striker Paolo Rossi back in the fold after a two-year suspension for his part in a betting scandal, would qualify from Group 5 alongside Yugoslavia, while the United Kingdom would also boast a strong presence in Spain, despite the fall-out from the recent conflict in the Falkland Islands which briefly threatened the home nations' participation.

Scotland and Northern Ireland would come through the same group, ahead of Sweden, Portugal and Israel, while England endured a sticky campaign with some embarrassing results (a 2-1 defeat to Norway being the nadir) to take second spot behind Hungary.

We're all off to sunny Spain…

Around the world, the competition for places was more intense than ever. In South America, Brazil, Chile and Peru (at the expense of Uruguay and Colombia) all won through from their mini-leagues to join Argentina at the Finals while in the CONCACAF region a little further north, it was Honduras and El Salvador that progressed to Spain.

In Africa, Cameroon would edge out Morocco, and Algeria would defeat Nigeria to go through while the final two spots, in the Asian and Oceania section, would be taken by Kuwait and New Zealand. One hundred and eight had finally become 24 and the stage was set for FIFA's biggest ever show.

To accommodate the additional eight teams, FIFA had also changed the format of the World Cup Finals. While there would still be groups of four teams to begin with (only with six groups this time, rather than four), there would now be an additional group stage in the Quarter-Finals whereby four groups of three teams would play a round-robin mini-league, with the winner of the mini-league progressing to the Semi-Final. In all, it would take the winning team a total of eight matches to become world champions – the most ever.

As was tradition, the Finals began with a match involving the reigning champions – this to be played at Barcelona's Camp Nou – although Argentina's opponents, Belgium, had

June 13, 1982, Barcelona. Maradona made his first appearance at a World Cup Finals in Spain, but would have to wait four years to really make his mark.

clearly failed to read the script. For their Group 3 match in Barcelona, Argentina's side had been bolstered by the presence of their midfield magician, Diego Maradona, the prodigious talent who had controversially been omitted from the World Cup-winning squad four years earlier. Belgium, meanwhile, hadn't scored a goal in a World Cup Finals since 1970. All that would change, however, when Erwin Vandenbergh scored in the 62nd minute to give the Belgians a lead they would not relinquish. Fortunately for César Luis Menotti and his Argentina side, two sides still went through from the group and they would join Belgium in the Quarter-Finals after victories against Hungary and El Salvador.

This time, we'll get it right

In Group 4, England had finally returned to the fray of the World Cup Finals, qualifying for the first time since 1970. Though he had considered standing aside after the failure to qualify for Argentina in 1978 and a less than auspicious qualifying campaign, manager Ron Greenwood had agreed to stay on for one last hurrah in Spain and, initially, it had seemed to be going swimmingly.

Drawn in a group with Czechoslovakia, France and Kuwait, England got off to the perfect start against the French when, in the stifling heat of Bilbao's Estadio Sam Mamés, they scored after just 27 seconds, Manchester United's Bryan Robson hooking in from close range. Though most of the media reports declared it to be the fastest goal in the history of the World Cup Finals, there had been a goal scored at the Finals in Chile in 1962 by Czechoslovakia's Václav Masek after just 15 seconds – or was it 11? – against Mexico.

Still, the goal nevertheless gave England a lead and Robson an inscribed gold Seiko watch for his achievement. The match would end in a comfortable 3-1 win for England and set them up for a 100 per cent record in Group 4, with wins over Czechoslovakia and Kuwait. But winning their group would do England few favours. Now, as a reward for emerging from their group with an almost faultless record, they found themselves in a group with the hosts Spain and the ever-present threat of West Germany.

Poland and Italy would emerge from Group 1, the latter on goal difference ahead of Cameroon, while in Group 6, Brazil simply powered through the preliminaries, winning all three games and scoring ten goals in the process, four of which went past the hapless Scotland goalkeeper Alan Rough. It would be a costly defeat for the Scots who went home, eliminated on goal difference (as they had been four years earlier) and leaving the USSR to snap up second place.



Yet the team that qualified with them, Northern Ireland, were having the time of their lives in Group 5. For Billy Bingham's team, it was achievement enough just reaching the Finals. Now, after a goalless draw against Yugoslavia, in which Norman Whiteside, aged 17 years and 41 days, broke Pelé's record to become the youngest player to appear in a World Cup Finals, and a 1-1 stalemate with Honduras, they went into their final game against Spain unbeaten but still knowing that only a win would guarantee their progress to the next round.

It was a tall order but one that would help provide one of the greatest nights in the history of the province. After a goalless first-half in Valencia, the Irish broke downfield soon after the restart with a surging run from Gerry Armstrong. Laying the ball out to the right flank, he continued his run and as Billy Hamilton's teasing cross was only parried by Luis Arconada in the Spanish goal, there was Gerry Armstrong, the man who had started the move, to crash the ball home, low and hard.

For the next 40 or so minutes, Northern Ireland defended as though their lives depended on it and, despite losing their defender Mal Donaghy, dismissed for a push on José Antonio Camacho on the hour mark, they held on for a famous victory.

Northern Ireland on top of the world

Remarkably, Northern Ireland had not only progressed to the next round but they had won their group, remaining unbeaten and defeating the host nation along the way for good measure.

It was the best of times for Billy Bingham and his band of brothers. But it had also been a close call for Spain. Having beaten Yugoslavia in their second game, by virtue of a controversial penalty, they had the same goal difference as the Yugoslavs but went through by virtue of scoring one more goal. Home interest in the tournament was still alive, but only just.

IT HAD ALSO BEEN A CLOSE CALL FOR SPAIN. HOME INTEREST IN THE TOURNAMENT WAS STILL ALIVE, BUT ONLY JUST.

The major talking point of the opening exchanges, however, came in Group 2 where West Germany were drawn against Austria, Chile and the team they would face first, Algeria. West Germany had arrived in Spain as one of the pre-tournament favourites and their record in qualifying – played eight, won eight, scored 33, conceded three – was nothing short of sensational. While they had every right to feel confident, there was little need for some of the arrogance and complacency they had started to exhibit ahead of their opening game against the minnows of Algeria.

One German player spoke of dedicating "our seventh goal to our wives, and the eighth to our dogs", while another pledged to play the game with a cigar in his mouth. Even the manager Jupp Derwall was joining in the free-for-all, insisting that if his team lost he would "jump on the first train back to Munich".

Second-class ticket to München?

In an upset that bore comparison to the USA's victory over England in 1950 and North Korea's shock win over Italy in 1966, Algeria not only beat West Germany but they outplayed them, and their 2-1 victory was a result achieved with considerable panache.

Even when the Germans equalised through Karl-Heinz Rummenigge, the Algerians didn't panic. Instead they strung a delicious nine-pass move together straight from the restart and regained their advantage, Lakhdar Belloumi finishing the move from close range. Certainly, cigars were conspicuous by their absence on the West German team bus later that day.



On the evening of June 25, 1982, **GERRY ARMSTRONG** scored the vital goal in what would prove to be the greatest night in the history of Northern Ireland's national team. Here, he recalls that heady night in Valencia…

Gerry Armstrong on a night to remember...

Our campaign hadn't quite gone to plan. After the draw with Yugoslavia we had been hoping to beat Honduras so we could maybe get a draw with Spain and go through but it didn't work out that way. Instead, we went into our final group game needing to beat Spain to progress. I'm not sure anybody apart the team thought we could do it though.

We knew that the Spaniards had underperformed so far in the tournament but as the hosts they were under a lot of pressure. We had also watched them play Honduras and win, but they had been very lucky in that game, getting a dubious penalty, so we knew they were going to come at us in the first 15 or 20 minutes and we would have to absorb it.

But our captain Martin O'Neill called it right. The day before the game against Spain, we were sat around the hotel pool and he turned to me and said: "We know they are going to come at us but we'll get two or three chances, we'll stick one away and we'll win 1-0." I wish I'd had some money on that.

It was 0-0 at half-time and we had defended really well. But early in the second half, Rafael Gordillo was attacking down the left-wing when he tried to knock a pass to Roberto López Ufarte but I intercepted it and set off on a run.

As I got to the halfway line, Miguel Alonso – Xabi Alonso's dad – tried to kick me but I kept going before passing it to Billy Hamilton. And Billy did brilliantly.

He took it past Miguel Tendillo and then stuck in a great cross. To be honest, I should have gone for that cross but I didn't think he'd do so well with it so I didn't bother.

As it happened, Luis Arconada in the Spanish goal made a mistake and couldn't hold it and the ball came straight out to me, so I just kept my head down, put my foot through it and it went through his legs and in the back of the net.

I was half expecting the referee to disallow it because he hadn't given us many decisions up to that point but when Sammy McIlroy and Norman Whiteside started celebrating, I knew it was going to stand.

There was nearly 50,000 in the crowd at Valencia that night and only around 350 of them were our fans. When I scored, there was just this deathly silence. I'll never forget it.

That team went on for three or four years more, qualifying for the next World Cup in Mexico and wining Home Nations Championships, too, so I think we proved it wasn't a fluke. But, put simply, that win against Spain in Valencia was the biggest result Northern Ireland has ever had in international football. To beat the host nation in a World Cup Finals and then qualify as group winners for the next stage? It doesn't get much better than that.



July 8, 1982, Seville. In one of the most shocking moments in World Cup history, West Germany's Harald Schumacher jumps past the ball before colliding with Patrick Battiston. The Frenchman would lose three teeth and suffer damaged vertebrae in the challenge.

Though West Germany bounced back with a 4-1 win against Chile, it was a quirk of FIFA's format in 1982 that the final groups games in the opening round did not all take place at the same time (as they do today) which meant that having seen Algeria beat Chile 3-2 to finish on four points, West Germany and their neighbours Austria knew that a 1-0 win for Jupp Derwall's side in the final game would see both nations progress at the expense of Algeria on goal difference.

But what happened in Gijón remains one of the darkest days in the history of the World Cup Finals. In front of 41,000 fans, West Germany and Austria contrived to manufacture the result that suited both nations and after Horst Hrubesch scored on ten minutes, the game all but stopped. No shots were taken and barely a tackle made and the crowd was incensed. Disgusted Algerian fans waved banknotes at the players while the Spanish contingent shouted *"Fuera, fuera"* ("Out, out").

After 80 more minutes of nothingness, the result both teams needed had come to pass and the howls of derision could almost be heard back in Algiers. Later, Algeria would make an official protest to FIFA but to no avail, and the only consolation, for what it was worth, was that from the 1986 World Cup Finals, all concluding group games would now kick-off at the same time, just to avoid anything quite so cynical and unpleasant ever happening again.

Unbeaten England are out

West Germany's prize for their hollow victory was a place in the same Quarter-Final group as England and the hosts Spain. Again, they would progress, a 2-1 win against Spain and a goalless draw against the old enemy England enough to see them through. It was especially tough on England. Having only conceded one goal and remained unbeaten after five games, they found themselves out of the tournament. It seemed unjust, plain wrong even, but by virtue of the fact that West Germany had beaten Spain, England were out.

For the next World Cup, FIFA would change the format so that after the initial group stages, the competition would revert to a straight knockout. Not that that was any consolation for Ron Greenwood and England. It was a similar story in Group A where the USSR won one game and drew the other, and all without conceding a single goal, and yet still went out as Poland progressed thanks to a better goal difference.

But it was more clear cut in Group D where France ended Northern Ireland's World Cup journey, beating them 4-1 and Austria 1-0 to qualify for the Semi-Finals with some ease.

Class acts

The real fireworks of the Quarter-Finals would come from Group C, where Italy, Brazil and the reigning champions Argentina faced each other in a group contest positively overflowing with talent.

With Italy beating Argentina 2-1 and Brazil going one better against their South American rivals, 3-1, it not only sent Menotti's team home, bottom of the table, but also saw their star player, Diego Maradona, dismissed for a wild, flailing elbow and kick on Batista.

Though everyone could see what a rare talent Maradona was, he would have to wait another four years for another chance to shine on the world's biggest stage. It left the final match of Group C, between Italy

and Brazil, as the winner-takes-all decider for a place in the Semi-Final. Often, great games of football are too quickly labelled a "classic" but few actually qualify for such lofty status. But the match in Barcelona between these two sides, both with such a long and rich history in the World Cup, would stand alone not just as the game of the 1982 World Cup Finals but as one of the greatest of all time.

The connoisseur's encounter

From start to frenetic finish, it was a pulsating encounter. Paolo Rossi opened the *Azzurri*'s account within five minutes, only for Sócrates, Brazil's charismatic, chain-smoking and super-talented skipper, to level matters after a mazy, mesmeric run.

Rossi restored Italy's lead after 25 minutes, only for Falcão to peg them back with one of the goals of the tournament. Then, with a quarter of an hour to go, Rossi completed his hat-trick and this time the boys from Brazil had no answer.

If the match between Brazil and Italy had staked a claim to being one of the best in World Cup history, there would be another contender in the Semi-Final between West Germany and France in Seville, a game that while undeniably exciting would also be remembered for one of the most controversial moments ever seen at the Finals.

Level at 90 minutes, the game had gone into extra-time at which point the French had moved ominously into a 3-1 lead and their first appearance in the World Cup Final seemed all but assured. It looked as though they may even increase their advantage when Patrick Battiston latched on to a through ball from Michel Platini and knocked it past the advancing West German goalkeeper Harald Schumacher. But as Battiston chased the ball down, Schumacher leapt up and pole-axed the Frenchman, leaving him motionless on the pitch.

Lucky to be alive

It was less of a tackle than it was a common assault but as the paramedics rushed to help him, even administering oxygen, the Dutch referee Charles Corver didn't even award a free-kick, let alone a red card. Instead, he just pointed for a goal kick.

It was a hideous challenge. Battiston would lose three teeth, suffer damaged vertebrae and also slip into a coma shortly after. Michel Platini even thought he was dead because "he had no pulse and looked pale".

Mercifully, Battiston would make a full recovery, even helping France to win the 1984 European Championship two years later, but Schumacher's reputation would forever be tainted by the incident.

It was inevitable, then, that Schumacher would play a pivotal part in the outcome of the game. Despite the cushion of a two-goal lead, the French capitulated in the aftermath of Battiston's injury, allowing the West Germans to peg them back at 3-3.



July 11, 1982, Madrid. Marco Tardelli teaches the world's playgrounds how to celebrate scoring a goal in Italy's win over West Germany.

For the first-time in the history of the World Cup Finals a game would now be decided by a penalty shoot-out and when Schumacher saved Maxime Bossis' spot-kick, when plainly he should have been back in the changing room, the French found themselves on the wrong end of a 5-4 defeat on penalties.

In the other Semi-Final held at Barcelona's Camp Nou in front of 50,000, Italy, still buoyed by their historical win over Brazil, encountered few problems in overcoming Poland, and it was the hero of the Brazil match, No.20 Paolo Rossi, that came up with the goods once more, scoring both goals in a straightforward 2-0 victory.

If the tournament appeared to be getting more exciting with each passing round, it was brought back down to earth in the Final at Real Madrid's Santiago Bernabéu stadium. A stolid first-half passed with barely any incident. Shots on goal were at a premium and even when Italy were awarded a penalty, Antonio Cabrini still managed to knock it wide.

Once again, though, it would be Italy's prodigal son, Paolo Rossi, that would make the breakthrough, heading home a bouncing cross from Claudio Gentile just as the hour mark approached.

It was Rossi's sixth goal in the tournament and one that would guarantee him not just the Golden Boot but the Golden Ball award for being the tournament's best player. His redemption, it seemed, was complete.

With West Germany wilting, their endeavours against France in the Semi-Final now taking their toll, Italy pressed and were rewarded on 69 minutes when Marco Tardelli shot home from the edge of the penalty area. His now legendary celebration, as he wheeled away, arms pumping, and sprinting back



towards the Italian bench, would be one of the defining images of the 1982 World Cup.

No coming back

The *Azzurri*'s victory was all but complete when, with nine minutes left to play, Alessandro Altobelli, on for the injured Francesco Graziani since the seventh minute, completed a fine breakaway move to give Italy a three-goal lead.

Though West Germany would pull a goal back from their midfielder Paul Breitner, nothing could deny the Italians a third World Cup victory.

It was left to their captain and now the oldest man to win the World Cup, 40-year-old Dino Zoff, to lift the trophy and crown a professional career in which he had achieved virtually everything there was to in the professional game.

Italy's ability to time their run perfectly and play clever, tactically astute tournament football had stood them in good stead once more. Now winners of the World Cup on three occasions, equalling Brazil's record in the event, they had proved that an innate knack of handling the challenges of playing in the World Cup Finals was more use than having a side packed with flair and flamboyance.

France, for all their fight, would finish fourth after losing to Poland 3-2 in Alicante

Poor PR exercise for West Germany

For the West Germans, a side that had drew widespread criticism not just for the manipulated result against Austria that sent Algeria home but also for the unacceptable action of their goalkeeper, it was one game too far. For once, though, it had seemed as if justice, finally, had been done.

INTERVIEW

PAOLO ROSSI

HAVING SERVED A TWO-YEAR BAN FROM FOOTBALL FOLLOWING THE 1980 TOTONERO BETTING SCANDAL – OF WHICH HE MAINTAINS HIS INNOCENCE – ITALY'S PROLIFIC CENTRE-FORWARD RETURNED TO THE INTERNATIONAL STAGE IN 1982. HIS GOAL-SCORING EXPLOITS IN SPAIN EARNED THE JUVENTUS MARKSMAN THE GOLDEN BOOT.

In 1982, I had just returned from a suspension of two years and I had left for the World Cup in Spain both fearful and afraid, with so many doubts in my mind. I did not know if I would be back to being that player that everyone had admired in the first four games of Argentina '78. I did not know my physical and mental condition either, but I was counting on the contribution of my fellow players to help me through any really difficult moments.

We did not have a great start to the tournament, collecting two 0-0 draws against Poland and Peru and then only managing a 1-1 draw with Cameroon. In truth, we had so many difficulties and as a team it had seemed as though we were in a rut, entirely unable to express ourselves and unable to create any sort of good game. But equally we were always very attentive to each result. Yes, we cared – we just didn't know how to show it. At the end of that First Round we were just happy to have got through, even if we didn't shine. And we really didn't shine.

In the Second Round we played the reigning champions Argentina and we won 2-1. That game was very important for us because it restored our faith and gave us the belief that we could still be a great team. In fact, beating the world champions made us realise the true value of our team. We realised then that we could play together and, more than that, we could play well together.

Our next game was against Brazil, one of the strongest teams in the World Cup Finals. That game was the race of my life and I wanted to repay those who had shown so much confidence in me, particularly the Italian coach, Enzo Bearzot. We knew victory was entirely in our hands and that day in Barcelona's Sarrià Stadium [the ground of Espanyol], I was in a state of grace and everything I touched turned to gold. I felt so confident of my abilities, completely exulted by my qualities. No one could have stopped me from scoring those three goals.

The 3-2 victory against Brazil certainly infused a strong belief within the team that we could and should go on to win the tournament. Now there was an extraordinary new confidence and moral strength running through the team. Everything had changed, especially for me, and I also scored both goals in the Semi-Final win against Poland.

The Final against West Germany, meanwhile, was both beautiful and engaging. There was a truly magical atmosphere that night at the Bernabéu in Madrid. The Italian team was now like a runaway train – we were unstoppable. By now, we had reached the conclusion that no team in the tournament could hold our pace or obstruct our path. We were possessed of an enviable self-confidence and a real sense of certainty.

It was a wonderful feeling winning the World Cup that night and for the first time in my life I had the impression that I was holding the whole world in my hands. It was like a strange kind of omnipotence. I felt like the most important person in the world in becoming world champion and also the Golden Boot winner as the top scorer of the tournament. It's an emotion that only a few people have ever had the good fortune to live.



July 11 1982, Madrid. Paolo Rossi, World Cup winner and, with six goals, awarded the Golden Boot.





MEXICO 1986

A LAST-MINUTE STAND-IN AS HOST, MEXICO ONCE AGAIN DELIVERED A WORLD CUP FINALS THAT WOULD LIVE LONG IN THE MEMORY BUT THERE WAS ONE PLAYER WHO WOULD DOMINATE, AIDED BY DIVINE INTERVENTION.

Rarely has a World Cup Finals had to negotiate quite so many obstacles before a ball had even been kicked. Indeed, the story of how the 1986 tournament finally came to pass is one that encompasses everything from high hopes to dashed dreams, from economic uncertainty to shocking natural disasters and from controversy to calamity. That it happened was remarkable in itself. That it proved to be such a magical and memorable one was nigh-on miraculous.

Colombia '86

With Europe having held the World Cup in Spain four years earlier, it was now the turn of a South American nation to once more stage football's blue riband event and with Brazil (1950), Chile (1962) and Argentina (1978) all having staged the Finals already, FIFA decided, in June 1974, to ratify the selection of Colombia. At the time it had seemed like a sound decision. Not only was the Colombian bid unopposed but it promised the kind of vivid and spectacular event that the World Cup deserved and needed. After all, Colombia, like most other countries in the continent, was insanely passionate about football and there was the guarantee of enthusiastic crowds

But what had seemed like a dream selection soon turned into an administrative nightmare for both Colombia and FIFA. Crippling economic problems in the country coupled with genuine concerns as to whether it could host a safe and secure tournament saw enthusiasm wane and preparations stall. Despite the mountain of problems affecting Colombia, they still insisted that they could host the World Cup Finals but only if the number of teams taking part was reduced from 24 to 16. When FIFA declined, Colombia had nowhere else to go and on November 5, 1982, it announced its decision to surrender the rights to host the 1986 FIFA World Cup, promoting a fresh bidding process.

Host nation required, apply within

Though there were two heavyweight contenders in USA and Canada, ready

May 31, 1986, Mexico City. A Mexican fan waves a sombrero at the Estadio Azteca for the opening ceremony of the 1986 World Cup.



June 18, 1986, Querétaro. Spanish forward Emilio Butragueño scores one of his four goals in a 5-1 Quarter-Final demolition of Denmark.

to step in to host the tournament, FIFA awarded the tournament once more to Mexico, who had hosted such a memorable Finals 16 years earlier when Brazil had romped to their third World Cup title.

But Mexico, too, would also find their preparations hampered, only this time it was something that was entirely out of their control. On the morning of September 19, 1985, eight months before the World Cup Finals were due to begin, an earthquake measuring 8.0 on the Richter Scale struck the capital, Mexico City. The quake lasted for just 50 seconds but the damage to the city was immense and the loss of human life horrific.

An estimated 10,000 people died, with another 30,000 injured. Six-thousand buildings were destroyed and around 250,000 people lost their homes and the shock was so strong it could be felt as far away as Houston, Texas, 745 miles away.

One of the precious few positives to emerge after the earthquake was that the stadiums earmarked for use at the World Cup Finals had been miraculously left intact. It was a small blessing, even if nobody could quite see how they were going to stage an event as big as the World Cup Finals, given that the capital had been devastated and the competition itself was just a short time away.

Certainly, FIFA itself wasn't convinced by Mexico's confidence that the Finals could go ahead as planned and even began to look at yet more alternative hosts for the tournament.

As has been proved on innumerable occasions over the years, though, football has a knack of uniting people. Though there were protests against the government's priorities, the reconstruction of Mexico City continued apace, as did preparations for the World Cup Finals.

Colombian pathos

With Mexico now taking Colombia's place as host nation and reigning champions Italy qualifying as of right, the remaining 22 teams that made it through to the Finals proved to be an intriguing mix of the familiar and the unfancied. In South America, perennial front-runners Brazil and the hotly-tipped Argentina both won their qualifying groups, as did Uruguay, leaving a four-team play-off to decide the final qualifier from the continent. Eventually, it would be Paraguay that emerged victorious, beating Colombia and depriving them of a place at the very tournament they should have been hosting.

In Europe, meanwhile, the biggest shock came from Group 5 where Holland, the Finalists from 1974 and 1978, failed to make it through automatically and when faced with a two-leg play-off against neighbours Belgium, missed out on away goals. Elsewhere, though, all the heavyweight nations qualified, including West Germany, France and Spain, while the United Kingdom saw all of the national teams apart from Wales make the Finals. Northern Ireland once more defied the odds to qualify for their second successive World Cup Finals, finishing runners-up to England in Group 3.

Canada debut

Qualification in Africa, meanwhile, saw the northern nations of Algeria and Morocco claim the two places on offer while in Asia, Iraq and South Korea progressed at the expense of Syria and Japan respectively.

Finally, there was consolation of sorts for Canada who, having missed out on hosting the tournament, qualified for the World Cup Finals for the first time in their history, edging out Honduras and Costa Rica in the final shake-up of the CONCACAF qualifiers.

Despite the debacle of Colombia's withdrawal as hosts and terrible toll the earthquake had taken on Mexico City, the 13th FIFA World Cup Finals began as scheduled at midday on May 31, 1986 with a game between the holders Italy and Bulgaria at the Estadio Azteca, 7,200 feet above sea level. As the referee Erik Fredriksson blew his whistle to get the match under way, you could almost hear the sigh of relief emanating from FIFA's top brass. Somehow, in the face of sometimes overwhelming odds, they had managed to get the tournament up and running. Finally, it was game on.

Wonderful Copenhagen

Though entertaining, the group stages would give few surprises. Argentina and Italy emerged unbeaten from Group A, as did the hosts Mexico and Paraguay in Group B. In Group C, Canada went home goalless and without a point from their debut appearance in the Finals, allowing the USSR and France to progress, while Brazil and Spain encountered few problems in overcoming the challenge of Northern Ireland and Algeria in Group D.

In Group E, meanwhile, Denmark emerged as the surprise package of the tournament, winning all three of their games, including a 6-1 victory over Uruguay and a 2-0 win over West Germany.

The only team that really struggled to make headway was England. Drawn in Group F alongside Morocco, Portugal and Poland, they seemed to struggle to acclimatise to the searing heat and after a 1-0 defeat against Portugal and a draw against Morocco that saw captain Bryan Robson leave the field with a dislocated shoulder and fellow midfielder Ray Wilkins leave the field with the country's first red card in a World Cup Finals, Bobby



June 21, 1986, Guadalajara. Michel Platini captained France to the Semi-Finals after knocking out Italy and Brazil along the way.



June 11, 1986, Monterrey. Gary Lineker sparks life into the England campaign with a hat-trick in England's 3-0 win over Poland.

Robson's team needed to beat Poland in the final match to progress. Within 35 minutes, though, Robson's men were three goals to the good, a hat-trick by the Everton striker Gary Lineker securing England's safe passage through to the next round.

The new format of the World Cup Finals, however, meant that as well as the top two teams from each group going through as of right, four of the best-placed third-place teams would also secure a berth in the last 16. Or, to put it another way, it would take 36 games of football played over two weeks just to send eight teams home.

That said, certain sides would be grateful for the new format. Much-fancied Belgium, for example, sneaked through in third place in Group B behind a buoyant Mexico and a resolute Paraguay, while Uruguay would qualify from Group E with just two draws and a 6-1 hammering by Denmark to show for their efforts.

The goals would flow in the Second Round of matches. Belgium took full advantage of their good fortune in getting through by edging past the USSR in a seven-goal thriller, while on the same day, Mexico continued their impressive start to their campaign with a comfortable 2-0 victory over Bulgaria.

The following day, Brazil put down a marker for the rest of the field with a stunning 4-0 rout of Poland as their South American rivals Argentina stole a narrow 1-0 victory over two-time champions Uruguay. There were also differing fortunes for the Finalists from Spain 1982. While West Germany finally overcame a plucky Moroccan side, a single goal from the midfielder Lothar Matthäus making the difference, the holders Italy were eliminated, beaten 2-0 by a French team inspired by the evergreen Michel Platini.

Vulture culture

The Quarter-Final line-up would be completed by England, 3-0 victors over Paraguay, and by Spain, who dispatched the tournament's form team, Denmark, in a ruthlessly efficient manner. Though the teams were level, 1-1, at the interval, Denmark's capitulation in the second half was as surprising as it was rapid. Their chief tormentor would be the Real Madrid striker Emilio Butragueño, who plundered four goals as the Spanish ran out 5-1 winners. He wasn't known as *El Buitre* (The Vulture) for nothing.

With the tournament reaching the last eight, the stars of the World Cup were already beginning to emerge. But while Butragueño's finishing and fellow strikers like Gary Lineker (who had already scored five goals in England's four matches) had certainly caught the eye, there was one man who was already beginning to dominate the tournament – Diego Maradona.

Genius with a dark side

Everyone knew about Maradona. An Argentinian full international at the age of just 16 (although he was dropped from the victorious 1978 World Cup squad for being too young), he had enjoyed a remarkable rise to football stardom with Boca Juniors, Barcelona in Spain, and, after a then world record £6.9m transfer in 1984, at Italian Serie A side Napoli. Short in height but huge

in stature, he was a dashing, darting dynamo, capable of almost single-handedly defeating teams in one momentary flash of virtuosity. Playing behind the strikers, Maradona had a free role to go wherever he pleased, although, inevitably, that meant straight to the very heart of the opposition's defence. Solid, stocky and with an almost balletic sense of balance, here was a unique talent, a one-off, blessed with the talent, vision and audacity to change games almost at will.

Though he had played in the World Cup Finals in Spain in 1982, his and Argentina's campaign had not been a happy one, ending in the Quarter-Final Group Stage, when, against Brazil, Maradona was sent off five minutes from the end for taking a wild and frustrated swing at Batista. But in the years since Spain, Maradona's stock had risen still further. Following a successful spell at Barcelona, he had signed for Napoli in Italy and had become accustomed to some of the more rigorous methods defenders would employ to try and stop him.

But if there were nagging and persistent doubts about his ability to perform in international competition, especially on the biggest stage of all, Mexico 1986 would render that argument well and truly redundant. Throughout the tournament, Maradona had bewitched, bothered and bewildered the opposition – the archetypal box of tricks – scoring goals and making them, and propelling Argentina ever onwards.

Maradona destroys England

The Quarter-Final game against England exemplified the many, mercurial talents of Maradona, both good and bad. With relations between the two nations still frosty after the Falklands War four years earlier, this would be the first game between the countries and the stakes could not have been higher.

Though they weren't one of the pre-tournament favourites, Bobby Robson's England were still a strong and disciplined side, built around a spine of experienced players, including the goalkeeper Peter Shilton, Terry Butcher in central defence and the prolific striker Gary Lineker in attack. What they didn't have, though, was a player like Diego Maradona.

After a tetchy but uneventful first-half, the deadlock was broken in the 51st minute when Maradona, seizing on to a high miskick by Steve Hodge, leapt with Shilton and promptly prodded the ball into the goal with his hand. It was a clear handball and one so obvious, so apparent, that everyone in the Estadio Azteca saw it, except, it seemed, the Tunisian referee Ali Bin Nasser and his linesman. Later, Maradona would famously attribute the goal to "The Hand of God", a moment of divine intervention that he claimed showed the Almighty's support for Argentina in the battle over the *Malvinas* (Falklands Islands).

Unstoppable talent

If Maradona's first "goal" had been mischievous, his second, just four minutes later, would show the sublime side of Maradona that marked him out as the greatest player of his generation and, quite possibly, the greatest of all time.

Picking up the ball just inside his own half, Maradona cut a swathe though the English team, weaving in and out of tackles with the ball seemingly glued to his foot. With pace, power and vision, he homed in on the England goal and even when he reached the penalty area, he still had the imagination to drag the ball around Shilton's desperate grasp and steer it home into the unguarded net. It was an incredible, ridiculous goal. And



June 22, 1986, Mexico City. Argentina's Diego Maradona is assisted by the "Hand of God" in his side's defeat of England. Incredibly, the goal was allowed to stand.



June 29, 1986, Mexico City. Diego Maradona, the star of the show.

it wasn't just the goal of the match or the tournament either. No – in years to come, it would even be awarded FIFA's Goal of the Century award. It really was that impressive. Later, the renowned Uruguayan football commentator Victor Hugo Morales remarked that Maradona's dribbling was so sublime and so entirely unpredictable that trying to catch him, let alone tackle him, was akin to "chasing a kite in the wind".

Though England rallied, grabbing a goal back through Lineker (his sixth of the Finals and one which would eventually give him the Golden Boot award), Argentina held on for a famous victory and buoyed by Maradona's genius and ably assisted by a stellar supporting cast featuring the likes of Jorge Valdano and José Luis Brown, Argentina's progress continued apace.

Who can stop Maradona?

In the Semi-Final against Belgium – penalty shoot-out winners against Spain in the Quarter-Finals – Maradona took centre stage, scoring both goals in a comfortable and well-deserved victory, one of which saw him dancing through the opposition defence in another virtuoso performance.

Four days later, Carlos Bilardo's Argentina met Franz Beckenbauer's West Germany in front of over 114,000 people in the Azteca. It was an intriguing mix of styles; Argentina, a team centred entirely around the creativity of Maradona against a West German side who had lurked in the shadows in this World Cup, making steady, almost unnoticed progress as they edged ominously towards yet another Final appearance.

DIEGO MARADONA'S GOAL AGAINST ENGLAND WASN'T JUST THE GOAL OF THE MATCH OR THE TOURNAMENT. NO – IN YEARS TO COME, IT WOULD EVEN BE AWARDED FIFA'S GOAL OF THE CENTURY AWARD.

But it had seemed to be an unequal contest. For 75 minutes, Argentina had controlled the game, taking a two-goal lead through Brown and Valdano and seemingly coasting towards an inevitable victory. Suddenly, though, the Germans regained a foothold in the game as Inter Milan's prolific striker Karl-Heinz Rummenigge halved the deficit. Rejuvenated, West Germany pressed still further and were rewarded when a neatly-taken header by Rudi Völler levelled the scores.

Man of the tournament

It was an extraordinary turn of events and one that few observers had seen coming. With just five minutes remaining, however, and extra-time looking increasingly likely, Maradona managed to find some space in midfield, before picking out an exquisite through-ball for Jorge Burruchaga, who kept his head, and, as the German keeper Harald Schumacher came off his line, coolly slotted past him to win it for the South Americans.

For West Germany, it was another runners-up spot to follow the one they had achieved in Spain four years earlier. For Argentina, though, it was a second title to add to the one they had claimed on home soil in 1978. But this wasn't Argentina's World Cup; not really. It belonged to one man, a man who had played every minute of every match. A man who had scored five goals and made another five. And a man who had been, by some distance, the most creative, dynamic and influential player of the tournament. No, this World Cup belonged to Diego Maradona.

DIEGO MARADONA



For many observers, French midfielder Michel Platini was one of the finest footballers to ever grace a football field but even he bowed down at the feet of Diego Maradona. "Diego was capable of things no one else could match," he once said. "The things I could do with a football he could do with an orange."

Though he played for Argentina in four World Cup Finals (and managed his country in the 2010 Finals in South Africa), the 1986 event in Mexico, in which he all but won the tournament single-handedly, remains the very pinnacle of his professional career.

Small yet powerful, and blessed with almost balletic grace on the ball, Maradona cast his spell all over Mexico '86, deservedly winning the Golden Ball award for the tournament's best player. The Quarter-Final match against England typified both sides of the player, good and bad. He scored both goals in Argentina's 2-1 victory but the contrast between the two couldn't have been more pronounced. The first, a clear and entirely deliberate handball that Maradona later called the "Hand of God", was deception at best, cheating at worst.

But the second goal, when he ran 60 metres with the ball seemingly glued to his boot, beating England player after England player before rounding goalkeeper Peter Shilton and sliding the ball home was as close to football perfection as you can imagine. In 2002 the goal was voted Goal of the Century by FIFA. It was difficult to argue otherwise.

In the Final, he once more proved his worth when he evaded the close marking adopted by Franz Beckenbauer's side to provide the pass for Jorge Burruchaga to score the winner in a 3-2 victory. It was a fitting end to a remarkable tournament, both for Argentina and Diego Maradona.

Recently, Maradona's compatriot and the winner of seven Ballon d'Or awards, Lionel Messi, was asked about the influence Maradona had on his career. "Even if I played for a million years, I'd never come close to Maradona," he said. "Not that I'd want to. He's the greatest there's ever been."



July 29 1986. Diego Maradona is jubilant following Argentina's 3-2 defeat of West Germany in the 1986 Final. His goal against England a week earlier has been voted the best goal ever.

ITALY 1990

ITALIA '90 WAS THE WORLD CUP THAT PROMISED SO MUCH BUT FAILED TO DELIVER. NOT THAT WEST GERMANY CARED. DESPITE THE LACK OF EXCITEMENT, WE STILL HAD "NESSUN DORMA", GAZZA AND ROGER MILLA...

While everybody remembers with fondness the part that the late Luciano Pavarotti played in opening the World Cup Finals in Italy in 1990, the choice of the Puccini aria "Nessun Dorma" as the tournament's signature song, was, with the benefit of hindsight, a little off the mark.

Rose-tinted eyewear

Now if you're not aware, "Nessun Dorma" translates as "None Shall Sleep" which may well have been apt in *Turandot* but couldn't have been further from the truth at Italia '90. For whatever reason, many football fans still look back at Italia '90 as one of the great World Cups but a cursory examination of some of the facts, not to mention the dearth of attractive football, suggests that, if anything, it was one of the worst.

With goals at a premium, ill-discipline taking centre stage and defensive caution seemingly the preferred tactic, Italia '90 suffered for many reasons and even record television audiences did little to improve the perception that here was a World Cup where the expectation and anticipation far exceeded the reality of the standard of football on offer.

Lack of genius

That's not to say there weren't some very special moments. From the sudden and explosive emergence of Salvatore "Totò" Schillaci as one of the most potent strikers in the international game to the impetuous genius of England's creative midfielder Paul Gascoigne, there certainly were stars in the ascendant at Italia '90. The problem was that there just wasn't that many of them.

After the success of Mexico 1986, it would be Europe's turn to host the World Cup Finals and it was high time that the tournament returned to Italy. After all, it had been 56 years since Italy had last hosted the event and now, as three-time winners, it was only right and proper that one the world's proudest footballing nations received the nomination ahead of rival bids from Greece, the USSR and England.

While there were an initial 116 teams that had entered the qualification stages around the world, there would be a series of rejections, withdrawals and expulsions that saw the likes of Mozambique, Mauritius and Belize all denied entry because of outstanding financial issues. Seven teams, including Bahrain, Lesotho and Togo, pulled out before they had actually played a game. Controversially, Mexico, the host nation just four years earlier, would be thrown out of CONCACAF qualifying for fielding overage players in the qualifying stages of the 1988 Olympic Games football tournament.

Strong contenders

In Europe there would be some stand-out performances from some of the bigger nations, with the likes of West Germany, Holland, Belgium, Sweden and Yugoslavia all progressing to the Finals without losing a game and, after a disappointing European Championship in 1988, Bobby Robson's England would also qualify without losing or even conceding a single goal, although that record still wasn't sufficient to overhaul Sweden at the top of Group 2.

ITALIA '90 STARTED IN SPECTACULAR STYLE WHEN, IN MILAN'S SAN SIRO STADIUM, THE HOLDERS ARGENTINA SUFFERED A SHOCK REVERSE AT THE HANDS OF CAMEROON.

Scotland would also qualify as runners-up in Group 5, behind the runaway winners Yugoslavia, as did the Republic of Ireland, who, under their English manager Jack Charlton, qualified for their first ever major tournament finals, taking second spot in Group 6 behind Spain. That said, there would also be some notable absentees from Italia '90 as France and Portugal failed to progress.

In South America, serial qualifiers Uruguay and Brazil would once more advance to the finals, while Colombia would make it through after the narrowest of play-off victories against the winners of the Oceania group who, it transpired, wasn't Australia or New Zealand, but, thanks to some more imaginative thinking from FIFA, was now the hastily relocated Israel. Further north, it would be the USA and, for the first time in their history, Costa Rica, taking the two spots on offer. The remaining places would be taken by Egypt and Cameroon from the African competition and South Korea and the United Arab Emirates from the Asian section.

Cameroon – everyone's second team

But if Italia '90 failed to live up to its pre-tournament billing, at least it started in spectacular style when, in Milan's San Siro stadium, the holders Argentina suffered a shock reverse at the hands of Cameroon, a team who, despite having two men red-carded, both for full-on assaults of Argentina's tousled striker Claudio Caniggia, managed to pinch a goal midway through the second-half courtesy of a header from François Omam-Biyick and managed to hang on for a win

It wouldn't be the first shock that Cameroon delivered in the tournament. Cast in the role of perennial underdogs, the so-called Indomitable Lions then defeated Romania 2-1 and even though they lost their final game 4-0 to the USSR, they would qualify for the Second Round as group winners, leaving Argentina to scrape through as one of the two best third-placed teams.

Scotland, so near yet so far

While Argentina had struggled to impose themselves on the tournament, most of the other major football powers seemed to be breezing into the Second Round with few problems.

Brazil, for instance, topped Group C, winning all of their three games, including a narrow 1-0 victory over a spirited Scotland who so nearly got the draw they needed to take them through to the second phase. It had been another frustrating World Cup Finals for Scotland. Despite beating Sweden 2-1 in Genoa, they had lost their opening match to Costa Rica, the Central American nation making their debut appearance in the World Cup Finals.

Elsewhere, it was a case of the usual suspects making moves towards yet more World Cup success. Italy breezed through Group A, winning all three games without conceding a goal, West Germany scored


June 8, 1990, Milan. Cameroon stunned the world by beating Argentina 1-0.

ten goals to lead the way in Group D and Spain, aided by four goals by the Real Madrid midfielder Michel, took top spot in Group E.

But it was in Group F where World Cup history would be made. Featuring England, Holland, the Republic of Ireland and Egypt, it would be the tightest group ever seen in the World Cup. At the end of the first two rounds of matches, all four teams were level on points and on goal difference, and the places in the Second Round were up for grabs.

Luck of the Irish

While a lone goal from the Derby County central defender Mark Wright would be sufficient to send England through as group winners, eliminating Egypt in the process, the 1-1 draw between the Republic of Ireland and Holland would see the two teams finish with identical records, meaning that for the first time in World Cup Finals history, lots would be drawn to determine who would take the second qualifying spot.

Luck would favour the Irish, not that Holland were too troubled, as they would still progress as one of the two teams with the best third-place records. That said, the third place meant the Dutch would now be playing their fiercest rivals, West Germany, in the Second Round. It wasn't the only clash of the titans in the last 16 as Argentina suffered the same fate as the Dutch, their unexpectedly low qualifying spot in Group B resulting in a Second Round match against three-times champions and their arch enemies, Brazil. But this was not a vintage Brazilian side. Yes, they had household names like Careca and Branco in their ranks – and certainly they had chance after chance to score – but they were thwarted by poor finishing and the inspired performance of Argentina's Sergio Goycochea, the second-choice goalkeeper thrust into action after Nery Pumpido broke his leg in the group game against the USSR.

As it was, it would take another sublime moment of magic from Diego Maradona to decide the tie. Picking the ball up in the centre circle, he weaved his way in and out of the Brazilian midfield and as he bore down on the defence, he picked out Claudio Caniggia with the kind of pass that few other players would have seen, let alone executed so perfectly. Rounding Taffarel in the Brazilian goal, Caniggia slotted the ball home, securing Argentina's place in the Quarter-Finals.

The game between West Germany and Holland would be equally spicy. A re-run of the 1974 World Cup Final, it would also end with precisely the same scoreline too, as the West Germans emerged victorious once more. The game would be remembered, however, for some of the most unsavoury scenes ever witnessed at the World Cup Finals as Holland's Frank Rijkaard, angry for what he claimed was blatant diving by Rudi Völler, saw red for spitting at the German striker; Völler went, too.

Costa Rica and Cameroon: the entertainers

Costa Rica's entertaining run in the competition, meanwhile, would come to an end against free-scoring Czechoslovakia. Beaten 4-1 – Tomás Skuhravy scoring a hat-trick – they had astounded everyone with two wins in the group stages and had brought a new and dynamic element to the competition. Now they could leave with their heads held high. But while Costa Rica departed, the other surprise package of the tournament, Cameroon, continued with their progress.

In the match with Colombia, their ageless striker Roger Milla – who was believed to be 38 – had come off the bench to score twice in extra-time, celebrating his goals in his now customary manner of running over and dancing with the corner flag. While Colombia would pull one back, it would be too little and too late as Cameroon booked their



July 3, 1990, Naples. Totò Schillaci fires Italy 1-0 up against Argentina in the Semi-Final but the game would go to penalties.

place in the Quarter-Finals – the first African team to do so.

Big Jack

While Italy eased past Uruguay 2-0 and Yugoslavia upset Spain, winning 2-1 in Verona, there would be drama in the other remaining two games as Jack Charlton's Republic of Ireland came through a tense game against Romania, with David O'Leary's shoot-out penalty putting them into the Quarter-Finals in their very first appearance in the Finals. England, meanwhile, would leave it until the final minute of extra-time to beat Belgium, thanks to a wondrous goal from David Platt who had latched on to a free-kick from Paul Gascoigne and volleyed a remarkable winner with just seconds to spare.

The dramatic win would see England advance to a Quarter-Final game against one of the surprise packages of the event, Cameroon, and it would prove to be one of the matches of the tournament, not least because there seemed to be more goals and opportunities in this game than in the rest of the competition combined.

Initially at least, Bobby Robson's England seemed to be in control of a game they were expected to win, a David Platt header putting them ahead after 25 minutes. But if they thought they were in for an easy night, they were wrong. After the break, Cameroon laid siege to Peter Shilton's goal and when Paul Gascoigne clumsily felled Roger Milla in the penalty area just after the hour, Emmanuel Kundé's resultant penalty brought them level. But worse was to follow. Just four minutes later Eugène Ekéké's neat finish past Shilton gave Cameroon a deserved 2-1 lead and suddenly, one of the biggest upsets in World Cup history was very much on the cards.

It was a breathless encounter, with England beating Cameroon 3-2 in extra-time. It was the highlight of an otherwise uneventful Quarter-Final line-up. Argentina contrived to squeak through courtesy of a penalty shoot-out victory against Yugoslavia, Italy finally put an end to Jack Charlton and the Republic of Ireland's adventure with a 1-0 win in Rome while a Lothar Matthäus penalty was sufficient for West Germany to edge past Czechoslovakia.

The Semi-Finals, then, would see four former world champions, with a total of eight World Cup titles between them, pitted against each other. Both games would be too close to call and both would go to extra-time and then penalties.

The Englishman's fear of the penalty kick

Penalties. Harsh and arbitrary. Dramatic and nerve-wracking. Commentators often say that it's no way to settle a game of football but if there is a fairer way to decide matters, it has either yet to be invented or it simply can't match the shoot-out for unbearable drama.

In the first match, hosts Italy would take on the defending champions Argentina in Naples. It was a surreal build-up to the game with Diego Maradona, a hero in Naples where he played his club football, urging all Italians to support Argentina instead of their own country.

Once more, though, it would be the tournament's fast-growing talent, Totò Schillaci, who broke the deadlock, netting the opener on 17 minutes and sending the home crowd into raptures.

That man again

Gradually, though, Argentina would pull themselves back into it. Driven by Maradona, they created a succession of chances and when Claudio Caniggia equalised midway through the second half, it was the first goal Italy had conceded in 517 minutes of play in the Finals. Inevitably, the game would go to extra-time and where it was clear that neither side really wanted to push for the win, perhaps as the reality of what was at stake began to bite, penalties seemed inevitable and when Diego Maradona converted Argentina's fourth kick, it left Inter Milan's Aldo Serena as the Italian fall guy.

EKEKE'S NEAT FINISH GAVE CAMEROON A DESERVED 2-1 LEAD AND SUDDENLY, ONE OF THE BIGGEST UPSETS IN WORLD CUP HISTORY WAS ON THE CARDS.

It was tough on Serena who had only put himself forward for a spot-kick when nobody else on the Italian team would volunteer. Still, it had been a good tournament for the host nation and but for a bit of luck they may have gone much further. For Argentina, this was their third Final in four tournaments.

The following day, England would take to the field at Turin's Stadio delle Alpi for their first World Cup Semi-Final since the heady days of 1966. For Bobby Robson, it was his last chance to emulate Sir Alf Ramsey and lead England to glory once more. He had already become the first English coach to lead the country to a World Cup Semi-Final on foreign soil but now he wanted to go one better.

While West Germany were the form side of the tournament, England's progress had been marked by a noticeable increase in their confidence, imbued largely by the outstanding performances of their young midfielder Paul Gascoigne. Again, Gascoigne would be at the heart of the action in Turin in what would be another impossibly fraught match.

They all count

After a goalless first half, it would be Franz Beckenbauer's West Germany that would carve themselves an advantage.

A free-kick on the edge of the England penalty area was driven towards the goal but had clipped the full-back Paul Parker on the way through and, somehow, looped over the head of Peter Shilton and into the back of the net.

To England's credit, though, there was no blind panic or any sign of throwing caution to the wind. Instead, they played their way back into the game and were rewarded for their endeavours with eight minutes left as Gary Lineker, so often England's man in the right place at the right time, steered the ball past Bodo Illgner in the West German goal to restore parity.

Daft as a brush

There would still be time for one more flashpoint, though, and it would be an image that would live long in the memory and, for England supporters at least, come to define the entire tournament.

With moments left until the final whistle, Paul Gascoigne lost possession and as he battled to get the ball back he succeeded only in bringing down Thomas Berthold. But when the referee brandished a yellow card to the 23-year-old – his second of the tournament – it was too much for him to take and as the realisation hit him that he would not be able to play in the Final should England go through, the tears began to flow. He needn't have worried. As the game headed into extra-time, both sides came close to edging ahead. Chris Waddle hit the post for England, while Guido Buchwald did the same for West Germany. But it would go to penalties.

Though England have a pretty poor penalty shoot-out record these days, this was the first time that England had faced the lottery of the shoot-out in a major tournament. Bobby Robson selected his five takers, overlooking Gascoigne in favour of David Platt, as the young midfielder was, by now, in no fit state to take one.

They were, in order, Gary Lineker, Peter Beardsley, David Platt, Stuart Pearce and, finally, Chris Waddle. It was a strong, confident line-up, all proven goalscorers or, in the case of Stuart Pearce, a regular penalty taker for his club, Nottingham Forest.

The first three England penalties all found their target but so too did the West German ones. Up strode Stuart Pearce. Huge of heart (and thigh), Pearce was as passionate an England player that had ever crossed the white line. A rock in the defence, he had given his all in England's pursuit of glory but his penalty, though hard and low, was straight down the



July 8, 1990, Rome. Argentina defender Pedro Monzón was the first player ever to be sent off in a World Cup Final.

middle and was saved by the legs of keeper Bodo Illgner.

As Shilton watched Olaf Thon's fourth penalty for Germany sting the corner of his net once more, it was down to the Olympique Marseille winger, Chris Waddle, to keep England in the World Cup. Opting for power, Waddle, now shorn of his trademark mullet haircut, blasted the ball, but it went high and not so handsome over the crossbar, before bouncing off the athletics track and into the grateful hands of a child in the stands.

Sad, a little ironic too

Down and now out, England had been beaten by the narrowest of margins and in the most heartbreaking of manners. As the German players ran to congratulate Illgner (not that he had actually had anything whatsoever to do with Waddle's miss), Bobby Robson, sat on the bench in his England blazer and tie, bowed his head, his international swansong now shattered.

England fared no better in the Third/Fourth Place Play-Off, where even a fine headed goal by David Platt, one of England's stars of the tournament, wasn't enough to hold Italy at bay, as the *Azzurri* won 2-1. It was small consolation for the hosts but Schillaci's goal in that play-off would be sufficient for him to take the Golden Boot for his six-goal tally. For a player who had made his international debut just before the World Cup Finals to end the tournament as top scorer was an astonishing way to introduce yourself to the world.

GERMANY HAD AT LEAST TRIED TO ENTERTAIN ON THEIR PATH TO THE FINAL IN ROME, SCORING MORE GOALS THAN ANYONE ELSE IN THE COMPETITION.

The Final – the first repeat Final in history – would be an anticlimax. Tense and tight, it was perhaps inevitable that it would be so disappointing given the distinct lack of highlights the tournament had offered up so far.

The defending champions Argentina had made it to the Final not with the kind of flair and flamboyance that had carried them to victory in Mexico in 1986 – they had scored just five goals in their six games en route to the Final – but with an uncharacteristic combination of stout defence and, at times, cynicism. With over 20 yellow cards blotting their copybook, they had bullied their way to the Final and relied on their adeptness in the lottery of the penalty shoot-out to progress.

For their part, Germany had at least tried to entertain on their path to the Final in Rome, scoring more goals than anyone else in the competition, but with the world's greatest prize at stake, it was hardly surprising that the game didn't develop into a free-flowing, end-to-end game of football.

If anything, it was niggly and ill-tempered, a fact never more evident than when, in the 65th minute, the Argentina substitute Pedro Monzón, who had been on the pitch for less than 20 minutes, was shown a straight red for a horror tackle on Jürgen Klinsmann, becoming the first player in 14 World Cup Finals to be dismissed.

Despite having the endless talents of Diego Maradona in their line-up, Argentina seemed intent on suppressing the greater attacking impetus of their opponents and as the game wore on – and it did wear on – it was as though they were more than happy to take the match into extra-time. This time, however, there would be no penalty shoot-out. Concerned by the overly negative approach of some of the teams in the tournament – most notably Argentina – FIFA had decreed that should the Final finish level then the game

would be replayed and not go to yet another spot-kick lottery.

Thankfully, though, the watching world was spared what would have been another unsatisfactory end to the tournament when in the 85th minute, Roberto Sensini brought down Rudi Völler and the Mexican referee Edgardo Codesal pointed to the spot. It was down to Andy Brehme, the man whose free-kick had looped in against England, to settle the match and the tournament. His penalty, low and hard, dutifully found the bottom corner of the goal.

The final action, somewhat appropriately, would see yet further angry scenes with the Argentine players once more surrounding Codesal as he dismissed Gustavo Dezotti for a second bookable offence.

Now, Argentina had finished the Final not just with nine men but with their reputation if not in the gutter then clearly sullied. It was an ugly and messy end to the match and, indeed, the tournament but the result had been the right one. West Germany had, after all, been the best team in the tournament and in winning their third World Cup helped their coach Franz Beckenbauer become the first man in history to captain and manage a World Cup winning side. Nobody could say he – and West Germany – didn't deserve it.

By no means a classic

It had been a stinker of a tournament and while Italia '90 may still be held up as a great tournament in England, purely because the national team reached a rare Semi-Final, the truth was it was one of the least impressive Finals in history. Yes, there had been a record total television audience of over 26 billion over the course of the tournament, but there was also a record tally of red cards (16), while the average number of goals per game (2.21) was not only the lowest in World Cup Finals history but remains a record to this day.

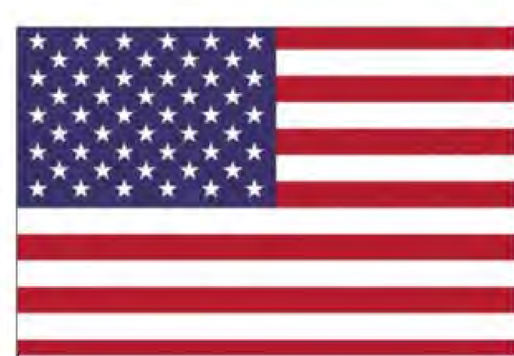
FIFA's grand re-think

Italia '90 would prove to be the last time that group games in the Finals would award just two points for a win as FIFA, in a bid to encourage more attacking football, changed the format to three points for a win soon after. They would also introduce a new rule banning goalkeepers from picking up back passes from outfield players, a tactic used repeatedly by teams at Italia '90 in order to waste time.

That FIFA were prepared to act in such a manner was proof, if it was needed, that the negativity and circumspection seen at Italia '90 was hardly the best advert for the world's most popular game. That something needed to change was clear. That FIFA was prepared to act – and so decisively – was surprising but overwhelmingly welcome.



July 8, 1990, Rome. West Germany's Andreas Brehme confidently places his penalty past Sergio Goycochea.



USA 1994

AMERICA WAS ONE OF THE FEW NATIONS THAT FIFA AND FOOTBALL HAD YET TO CRACK BUT THAT WAS ABOUT TO CHANGE. DESPITE MARADONA'S DRUG DISGRACE AND DIANA ROSS' MISSED PENALTY, THE CROWDS ARRIVED...



June 17, 1994, Chicago. The opening ceremony at Soldier Field, home of the Chicago Bears.

To say that the United States has had a difficult relationship with football – or soccer, as they prefer to call it – is something of an understatement. For decades, the world's fourth-biggest country had appeared to put up stiff resistance to the game that the rest of the planet had taken to its heart. Though football had always enjoyed a strong following among the nation's immigrant population and schoolkids, it had tried and failed on several occasions to sustain a successful professional league.

Briefly, of course, they had the North American Soccer League (NASL), a high-profile competition that had boasted a wealth of world-class stars like Pelé and Franz Beckenbauer, Johan Cruyff and Carlos Alberto, George Best and Bobby Moore, but it had been a league based not on developing the existing talent in the nation but on simply throwing money at the idea and importing the best talent the world had to offer. It was like building a house and starting with the light fittings.

Start of a domestic league

Though the United States had mounted a strong but ultimately unsuccessful bid to be the stand-in host in 1986, the desire to host the tournament never faded and by February 1987 they had already thrown their hat in the ring for the 1994 competition, a bid that would see them pitted against Morocco and Brazil. Fittingly, the United States would learn that their latest application had been successful on July 4, 1988 but by granting the USA the rights to host the 1994 World Cup Finals, FIFA would also insist that America must begin to form its own professional football league when the tournament was over.

Three points – now score goals

For once, FIFA had decided not to tinker with the format of the competition, splitting the 24 teams into six groups of four, with the six group winners, six runners-up and four best third-placed teams all going through to the last 16, from which point the tournament reverted to the knockout system. There was one significant change, however. After the stalemates and negativity of Italia '90, each group game would now award three points, rather than two, to the winning team, a move designed to encourage more attacking football.

Thanks to the efforts of Cameroon in 1990, African football would be buoyed by an additional place at the 1994 Finals, and while the Indomitable Lions would once more progress, so too would Morocco, who would be making their third appearance in the World Cup Finals, and Nigeria, who would be making their maiden outing.

In South America, Brazil, Colombia and Bolivia would all qualify automatically, while Argentina, World Cup runners-up in 1990, would go through after the narrowest of wins in a two-leg play-off over Australia. Mexico, meanwhile, would take the only automatic place on offer in the CONCACAF region, while Saudi Arabia and South Korea would win through from the Asia qualifying section.

Home nations put their feet up

There would be several firsts in the European qualification round as Russia, competing under this name for the first time since the dissolution of the USSR, and Greece, who had 12 failed attempts stretching back to 1934 to show for their efforts, both booked their places in the United States.

It would also be the first time since 1938 that not one of the home nations would qualify



June 21, 1994, Boston. Diego Maradona in high spirits against Greece. He would later leave the World Cup after shouting wildly into a TV camera and failing a drugs test.



July 17, 1994, Pasadena. Brazil's Romário would be named player of the tournament as the *Seleção* won their fourth World Cup title.

for the Finals. Scotland were always going to struggle in a group that contained Italy, Portugal and Switzerland; Wales finished a distant fourth in a group with Romania, Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Cyprus and the Faroe Islands; while Northern Ireland fell short in their group, which saw their neighbours the Republic of Ireland qualify once more, alongside Spain. But it would be a calamitous campaign for England and their coach Graham Taylor as away defeats to Norway and Holland saw them finish in third place and out of the top two qualifying spots.

After the promise of Italia '90, English football fans had expected much from the team as they sought to improve on the performance of four years previous. England, under Graham Taylor, hadn't just been under-par during qualification but, at times, had been verging on the woeful and at the end of their group games, Taylor would stand aside.

Ain't no goalmouth wide enough

The 1994 World Cup Finals would begin in spectacular fashion in front of 63,000 fans at Chicago's Soldier Field stadium and billions of others around the world. Featuring a speech from President Bill Clinton, it would be the kind of opening ceremony that only America could deliver.

That said, the moment where the Motown legend Diana Ross had to take a penalty will go down in history as one of the worst misses in the history of football. Tasked with kicking a giant football into a net from just five yards, Ross nevertheless managed to pull her shot wide. Despite the miss, the goal still magically collapsed on cue.

The game that followed between the newly unified Germany (participating as a single nation for the first time since the 1938 World Cup Finals) and Bolivia was hardly the glowing advert for football needed to convert an already sceptical nation about why the game really was the greatest of all.

While the German side were a little on the old side and familiar to most of their opponents, they would still have enough about them to breeze through their group undefeated, although they had to survive a scare in their final group game in Dallas when, having taken a 3-0 first-half lead against South Korea, they found themselves hanging on to scrape through 3-2.

Bringing the roof down

The host nation would begin their campaign in Detroit with a game against Switzerland under the roof of the cavernous Silverdome – the first time a World Cup match had been played indoors. After a draw with the Swiss, the United States would book their passage into the next phase with a momentous win against Colombia in front of almost 94,000 fans at Pasadena's Rose Bowl.

Though the Americans won the game 2-1, helped by an own goal from the Colombian defender Andrés Escobar, in time the game would be remembered for some truly tragic reasons. Finishing bottom of the group, Colombia would return home early but ten days later, as Escobar was leaving a restaurant in a Medellin suburb, he was shot dead by an assailant thought to be exacting revenge for the ruinous effect his own goal had had on the match bets that one of the Colombian drug cartels had made.

Group B would see Carlos Alberto Parreira's Brazil intent not just on making up for the hugely disappointing early exit at Italia '90 but also putting an end to what was turning into a very lean spell in the country's World Cup history. This time, though, Brazil seemed more organised and more disciplined than before and marshalled in midfield by their uncompromising captain Dunga and his right-hand man Mauro Silva, they had now added a certain steel to their set-up. Moreover, they also had Romário de Souza Faria – or simply Romário – one of the most prolific and predatory strikers in the business and with a goal in each of Brazil's group games, he would help steer his country through comfortably as group winners.

But while Brazil and Sweden would qualify from the group, you had to spare a thought for Russia and, in particular, their striker Oleg Salenko, who scored a record five goals in their 6-1 demolition of Cameroon, taking his total to six from Russia's three games, but still found himself heading home with only the joint Golden Boot award as the tournament's top scorer as a consolation.

Interesting drug

In Group D, meanwhile, Nigeria, Argentina and Bulgaria would all win twice but the story of who went through or went out was but a mere sideshow to an event that would come to dominate the tournament.

In their opening game against Greece, Alfilo Basile's Argentina had started in stirring fashion, romping to a 4-0 victory against Greece with Diego Maradona still working his magic in midfield and scoring a sensational goal, a strike which prompted one of the most memorable celebrations at the tournament – he ran to the side of the pitch, screaming right down the lens of one of the television cameras. Little did anyone know, however, just what was in store for Argentina's prodigal son. The day after Argentina's next game, a 2-1 win over Nigeria, news broke of a player who had

failed a drugs test and it transpired that it was none other than Diego Maradona. Later, when a second sample confirmed the results of the initial test, FIFA had little option but to suspend Maradona and send him home. It would prove to be the end of a long and illustrious international career that had spanned 17 years and 91 games for his country but the image of the fallen idol, running full pelt towards the camera, his eyes bulging and a crazed expression on his face, would live long in the memory.

NEWS BROKE OF A PLAYER WHO HAD FAILED A DRUGS TEST – NONE OTHER THAN DIEGO MARADONA. WHEN A SECOND SAMPLE CONFIRMED THE RESULTS, FIFA HAD LITTLE OPTION BUT TO SEND HIM HOME.

Group E, featuring Italy, Ireland, Mexico and Norway, would be impossibly tight, meanwhile. Each team would win one game, draw one and lose one and all would have the same points and the same goal difference. The pick of the games, though, would be Italy versus the Republic of Ireland in the Giants Stadium in East Rutherford, New Jersey, a match where Jack Charlton's indomitable side would exact sweet revenge over the *Azzurri* for the defeat at Italia '90 – thanks to a wonder goal by Aston Villa's Ray Houghton.

Due to having scored more goals, Mexico would advance as group leaders with the Republic of Ireland taking second place by virtue of their better head-to-head record against the team that would take third place, Italy. Fortunately for Italy, their haul of four points would be enough – but only just – to send them through to the last 16, leaving unlucky Norway to pack their bags.

The final group, Group F, would also end in a tie, with Holland, Saudi Arabia and Belgium all winning two games but all progressing, with the Dutch's better goal difference and their victory over the Saudis giving Dick Advocaat and his team the top spot and a game against the Republic of Ireland in the second phase.

Arabian heights

Perhaps the highlight of the group, though, would be one of the great World Cup goals when Saudi Arabia's Saeed Al-Owairan ran from his own half, beating half of the Belgian team in the process, before finishing coolly and giving his side a priceless 1-0 win over the Europeans and a place in the last 16. For debutants like Saudi Arabia and Nigeria, though, the second phase would prove to be the end of the road. Saudi Arabia acquitted themselves well in their 3-1 defeat to Sweden, while their fellow debutants Nigeria, who had surprised everyone with their enterprise and endeavour on their first appearance at the World Cup Finals, also ran out of luck as a brace from Roberto Baggio would take Italy through after extra-time in Foxborough, Massachusetts.

The USA's run, meanwhile, would end in San Francisco at the hands of Brazil, despite a valiant challenge from the hosts who also had Tab Ramos hospitalised for three months after a flying elbow from the Brazilian defender Leonardo fractured his skull.

Leonardo, meanwhile, would receive a four-match ban although it scarcely seemed sufficient and the idea that one of Brazil's genuine flair players could carry out such an assault seemed as preposterous as it was shocking.

Still, the United States, who had for so long been seen as a second-class citizen in the world of international football, had done their nation proud and nobody, but nobody could say that they didn't deserve their place at football's top table.

While many of the bigger names in the tournament, like Italy, Holland and Germany would progress through to the Quarter-Finals, some with more ease than others, there were also a couple of surprise packages making a name for themselves at the World Cup, most notably Romania and Bulgaria.

Romania, for instance, had topped Group A and then, in the last 16, beaten Argentina 3-2 in Pasadena's Rose Bowl, inspired in no small measure by their talismanic captain Gheorghe Hagi.

The bigger they come...

As for Bulgaria, they had not only beaten Argentina in the group stages but had also beaten Mexico on penalties in the Second Round before creating the upset of the tournament in the Quarter-Finals with a quite stunning 2-1 victory over the reigning champions Germany, the goals coming from the Barcelona striker Hristo Stoichkov and a spectacular headed winner by the balding Iordan Letchkov. And all this from a team that had never won a single game in all of their five previous World Cup Finals appearances.

Bulgaria's riveting run in the event, however, would end in the Semi-Final against Italy when they would be undone by the brilliance of Roberto Baggio, whose first-half double would be enough to see Arrigo Sacchi's side through.

Though Stocihkov would pull one back from the penalty spot just before the interval – a goal that would help him share the Golden Boot with Russia's Oleg Salenko – the *Azzurri*,



June 28, 1994, Stanford. Cameroon's Roger Milla becomes the oldest scorer at a World Cup Finals, at the age of 42, after his goal against Russia.



July 4, 1994, Stanford, California. Brazil's Leonardo receives a red card after badly injuring USA's Tab Ramos with an elbow.



July 17, 1994, Pasadena. Brazil's Dunga lifts the trophy, presented by US vice-president Al Gore.

yet again, had reached the World Cup Final, their fifth in total. They would be joined by another side that had been there, done that and bought several World Cup T-shirts along the way, Brazil, who had overcome a spirited challenge from Sweden to emerge as 1-0 winners, courtesy of another goal by the player of the tournament, Romário.

Not pretty

And so to a clash of the Titans that would see the winning team take the lead in the overall total number of World Cup titles won. With three crowns to their credit, Brazil and Italy had an enviable track record in the tournament and, not surprisingly, the match – played in a stifling temperature of 27°C – would be tight and cagey, not least because this was a Brazil team that was perhaps more defensively-minded than any of its predecessors. Of course, they had the requisite attacking flair, with Romário in the form of his life and some stellar support from his co-striker Bebeto.

For the first time in its history, the World Cup Final would be decided by a penalty shoot-out and it would prove to be more tense than the Final itself. The first two kicks, by Italy's Franco Baresi and Brazil's Márcio Santos would be missed and then saved.

While the next four would find their target, when Daniele Massaro missed Italy's fourth spot-kick and the Brazilian skipper Dunga converted his for Brazil, it left Roberto Baggio, the so-called "Divine Ponytail", needing to score to keep Italy in with a chance.

But no. The Juventus hero blazed his ball over the bar and stood still, his head bowed in utter disbelief, as the Brazilian team darted about in celebration.

FOOTBALL, SOCCER OR WHATEVER YOU WANTED TO CALL IT, HAD FINALLY REACHED THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

Record attendance figures

Brazil's win would be their fourth from five appearances in the World Cup Finals and though the winner would prove to be a familiar one, the 1994 World Cup Finals would nevertheless prove to be a watershed moment in the event's history. Financially, it would be the most successful on record, while any initial fears that the organisers may have had about poor ticket sales proved to be totally unfounded as Americans embraced each and every match leading to a record average attendance figures of 69,000 and a total attendance of 3.6 million, the highest in World Cup history.

The World Cup effect

It was the catalyst for change in the status of the game in the United States. Today, some of the world's best players, from David Beckham to Thierry Henry, have all made the move to play in Major League Soccer while the United States national team is a permanent fixture in the top 30 of the FIFA world rankings for international teams and has been as high as fourth (2006; ahead of Argentina and Spain) in the world.

And so what if the journey had been long and rocky? The main issue was that football, soccer or whatever you wanted to call it, had finally reached the United States of America and, more importantly, the American people had finally taken it to its heart.

FRANCE 1998

THE FIRST WORLD CUP FINALS IN FRANCE FOR 60 YEARS SAW THE HOST NATION, WITH ZIDANE, DESCHAMPS AND PETIT, FINALLY FULFILL THEIR VAST POTENTIAL, WHILE RONALDO'S BRAZIL RAN OUT OF STEAM...

It had been 60 years since France had last hosted the World Cup Finals and much had changed in international football. Back in 1938, the Finals had struggled to attract 16 teams to the competition as a raft of withdrawals and an increasingly unsettled political situation in Europe saw a host of teams fall by the wayside.

Fast forward over half a century and the World Cup Finals was bigger than ever, and in every way imaginable. And as the international game grew ever more popular, outgoing FIFA president João Havelange had sanctioned another increase in the number of teams that would qualify for the Finals. Now, rather than 24 teams, there would be a record 32 nations participating in FIFA's showpiece, a move designed to placate FIFA's ever burgeoning membership, which now stood at 193 countries – over three times what it had been in 1938.

Expansion benefits

With so many teams (174) now vying for a place in FIFA's pride-and-joy event, the qualification rounds would be hectic and protracted, not least because there were now five places up for grabs for teams from Africa and a whopping 15 for European nations, a process which would require nine qualifying groups and four play-off games to settle.

Despite the numbers competing, it was familiar faces that progressed to France 1998. Germany, Spain, Holland, Italy (via the play-offs) – these were serial qualifiers who knew only too well what it took to get through. But there were some relative unknowns in the mix too, with Croatia and Ukraine joining the fray. There would also be success for some of the home nations too, as Scotland advanced as the team with the best runner-up record, and England, under their new coach Glenn Hoddle, made it through, losing just one game, against Italy at Wembley.

England's old-fashioned grafters

Though Hoddle was always known as a flair player in his Tottenham days, it was clear that his England team could put a shift in too. The return game against Italy in Rome, where the *Azzurri* had won every game in the previous 15 years, was a case in point. Needing a point to qualify for the World Cup Finals they put in one of those archetypal, backs-against-the-wall performances that seemed 30 years out of date. Blood – quite literally in Paul Ince's case – sweat and, for once, only tears of joy.

Reggae boys

Elsewhere, Africa sent a strong contingent north, with Nigeria, Tunisia, South Africa, Cameroon and Morocco all qualifying while Saudi Arabia, South Korea and Japan all qualified from Asia via play-offs. In South America, Argentina, Paraguay, Colombia and Chile would progress, joining holders Brazil, while the CONCACAF region sent Mexico, the USA and – wonderfully – Jamaica.

MICHAEL OWEN'S GOAL WOULD PROPEL THE TEENAGER FROM PROMISING YOUNG STRIKER TO WORLDWIDE SUPERSTAR.

The 16th FIFA World Cup Finals kicked off on June 10, 1998 and it was Scotland who drew the short straw once more, pulling Brazil out of the hat yet again, and then losing in agonising fashion as the defender Tommy Boyd put through his own net towards the end of the game, to gift the South Americans a 2-1 victory.

While Brazil would win their second game against Morocco with a goal apiece for their lethal strikeforce of Rivaldo, Bebeto and Ronaldo, and qualify for the Second Round with a game to spare, it seemed as though Morocco would also be joining them in the last 16. But two extremely late goals for Norway in their final game against Brazil saw them overcome a one-goal deficit to steal a win and second place in Group A.

In Group B, Italy, as ever, would remain undefeated as they took top spot, while Chile, who could only muster three draws and three points from their games, still managed to claim the second place at the expense of Austria and Cameroon.

Meanwhile in Group C, host nation France, guided by coach Aimé Jacquet, would begin in imperious fashion, winning all three of their group games, and sending a country already consumed by the World Cup circus onto a heady new level of excitement. Denmark would also join them in the next phase.

A right Raúl mess

Spain's largely miserable World Cup record continued, even with such great names as Raúl, Luis Enrique and Fernando Morientes in their ranks. They were beaten into third place by Group D winners Nigeria and runners-up Paraguay, and this despite beating Bulgaria 6-1 in their final group game. Holland and Mexico, and Germany and Yugoslavia eased through in Groups E and F respectively.

In Group G, England booked second spot behind winners Romania as a David Beckham free-kick helped them to a 2-0 win over Colombia in a game both sides needed to win to advance. The only issue with coming second in the group, however, was that they would now face the winners of Group H in the next round – and that was their old enemy, Argentina.

Their game in Saint-Étienne, the last of the Second Round matches, would be another nerve-shredding experience for England's long-suffering supporters and, by some way, it was the game of the tournament. In a first half with more incidents, accidents and controversy than in the rest of the tournament combined, England fell behind after just six minutes when Gabriel Batitstuta squeezed his penalty past David Seaman.

Four minutes later, another penalty, this time hammered home by England skipper Alan Shearer, drew Hoddle's side level. After 16 minutes, the Liverpool striker Michael Owen, just 18 years old, received a pass near the halfway line before beating Jose Chamot and Roberto Ayala with his astonishing pace and then coolly slotting the ball past keeper Carlos Roa for a goal that would propel the teenager from promising young striker to worldwide superstar. Once again, though, the teams would be level. Deep into injury-time in the first half, a cleverly worked free-kick by the Argentinians found Javier Zanetti unmarked in the penalty area and in a flash, his shot was nestling in the net behind David Seaman.



June 30, 1998, Saint-Étienne. Michael Owen hugs Alan Shearer after Shearer puts England level against Argentina.


1
BERGKAMP
8


July 4, 1998, Marseille. Dennis Bergkamp scores one of the goals of the tournament in the last minute of Holland's Quarter-Final against Argentina to send the South Americans home.

Any chance England had of truly forcing the issue in the second half, however, would be undone by a spot of juvenile petulance from the Manchester United midfielder David Beckham. Clattered by the opposition's captain Diego Simeone, a prostrate Beckham had flicked out his leg and kicked the Argentine in full view of Danish referee Kim Milton Nielsen. Simeone was booked for the foul. Beckham, though, was dismissed.

Remarkably, England continued to press. Cruelly, a Sol Campbell goal was disallowed because of Alan Shearer obstructing the goalkeeper, otherwise it could so easily have been a famous and thrilling victory. As it was, the match would once more hinge on penalties. If penalties had been the undoing of England at Italia '90 and again on their home soil at Euro '96, then another helping was the last thing the Three Lions needed.

Eventually, Hoddle settled on his penalty line-up. Shearer, as ever, would lead, followed by Paul Ince, Paul Merson, Michael Owen and culminating with Leeds United's David Batty.

Hoddle is gutted

Shearer went first and scored, as did Sergio Berti. Hernán Crespo missed, with Seaman saving low to his left, but Paul Ince's almost identical kick would meet the same fate. The two teams then exchanged successful penalties until the fifth and final kicks. When Roberto Ayala coolly converted his, it was left to David Batty to keep England in the tournament. It wasn't to be. His tame effort was easily saved by Carlos Roa and Hoddle's dream was over. "My stomach," he said later, "felt as if it had been ripped out."

England's demise would be the only notable casualty from the Second Round, as all seven of the other matches seemed to go as expected. Brazil dispatched Chile 4-1 (with Ronaldo scoring twice), the same scoreline as Denmark's impressive victory over Nigeria. Germany and Holland both scored late winners to progress with 2-1 victories over Mexico and Yugoslavia respectively, while Italy and Croatia emerged from tight encounters with Norway and Romania to earn wins by a single goal.

Hosts France, though, would find the going tough against a plucky Paraguay as they scraped through in Lens, courtesy of an extra-time goal by defender Laurent Blanc.

Check point

Even without England, the Quarter-Final line-up would prove to be an enticing one, especially as less-fancied teams such as Croatia and Denmark seemed to be playing some of the best football of the tournament. Take Croatia in their distinctive red-and-white chessboard jerseys. With their confidence growing, they took on Germany in Lyon and, to the surprise of pretty much everyone, ran out comfortable 3-0 winners, with goals from Robert Jarni, Goran Vlaovic and the ever-impressive Davor Suker stunning Berti Vogts' ageing side.

Denmark would not be so fortunate, though. In a thriller of an encounter against Brazil in Nantes, they took the game to the South Americans, and were ahead after just two minutes when Martin Jorgensen put the Danes ahead as he tucked in a shot at Taffarel's near post.

The lead would to and fro. The industrious Bebeto squared matters on 11 minutes and after 27 minutes Brazil moved into the lead thanks to a clever dinked finish by Barcelona's creative genius Rivaldo. To their credit, though, Denmark refused to buckle and five minutes after the break, they had their reward for perseverance, with Brian Laudrup pulling them level. But joy would be short-lived. On the hour mark, Rivaldo unleashed a low left-foot shot from 25 yards that ripped past Peter Schmeichel's outstretched left hand and nestled in the corner of the net, ending Denmark's stubborn resistance.

At the Stade de France in Paris, meanwhile, the hosts once more found themselves in another too-close-to-call contest as they struggled to break down Italy's notoriously resilient defence. Even the return of Zinedine Zidane, back from suspension, couldn't make a difference and a tense penalty shoot-out would end when Roma's Luigi Di Biagio smashed his spot-kick against the crossbar, collapsing on the turf as the ball bounced out. The French players celebrated wildly. After the shock of the shoot-out in the Final four years earlier, Italy had, again, gone out in heartbreaking fashion.

Dennis the menace

The last Quarter-Final, between Holland and Argentina, would be settled with one of the goals of the tournament. Poised at 1-1 and heading inexorably towards extra-time, it was left to Dennis Bergkamp to decide the match with a piece of exquisite skill. Latching on to a 60-yard pass, he pulled it down as though it were a balloon on a piece of string before turning back inside and then firing home to send Holland through.

It left a rare Semi-Final line-up with only one previous winner – Brazil. In Marseille's Stade Vélodrome, Holland's wretched luck at the World Cup Finals continued as Brazil dumped them out of the competition on a penalty shoot-out with Phillip Cocu and Ronald de Boer missing. The other Semi-Final would pit France against Croatia. In their first official

World Cup campaign as a stand-alone nation Croatia, under Miroslav Blazevic, had surprised everyone with their inventive football and in Davor Suker, they had a player who bore comparison with the very best that was on show at the tournament. But their impressive run would come to an end. Though they took the lead just after the interval with Davor Suker steering the ball under Fabien Barthez as he came off his line, two rare goals by the defender Lilian Thuram would send France through. Incredibly, those two Semi-Final goals would be the only goals Thuram would score in his record 142 appearances for his country.

Bilic KO's Blanc

The only negative from another stirring night at the Stade de France would be the dismissal of France's defensive stalwart Laurent Blanc. Attempting to free himself from the close attention of Slaven Bilic, Blanc had shoved the Croatian, but Bilic fell to the ground clutching his forehead as though he had been on the receiving end of a heavyweight's haymaker. Sadly, the referee, Spain's José Maria García-Aranda, bought Bilic's act and gave Blanc, one of the lynchpins of the French side, a red card. It meant he would miss the Final. The injustice of Blanc's dismissal merely served to galvanise Aimé Jacquet's side.

Memorable debut

To their credit, Croatia would pick themselves up and eventually claim third place in their debut appearance in the World Cup Finals, defeating Holland 2-1 in the Third/Fourth Place Play-Off at Parc des Princes – the winner coming from Golden Boot winner Davor Suker.

It had been a remarkable first stab at the Finals for Blazevic's side and a campaign that, the Bilic incident aside, had brought them a lot of admirers along the way. Not that anybody in France really cared. No, this was the moment that France and French football had waited 68 years for, the moment when they reached the World Cup Final. It was scarcely believable that France had just three Semi-Final appearances to show for all their years of toil in the World Cup but finally, they had managed to make that all-important step up. Now, all that stood between them and *victoire* was the four-time winners Brazil.

We need to talk about Ronaldo

The build-up to the Final, however, would be dominated by rumour and counter rumour about Brazil's star striker, Ronaldo, whose place in the Final seemed to be in doubt. One moment he was playing then he wasn't. He had suffered a fit and been hospitalised, then he was back with the Brazilian squad. He was out of the team, then he was back in again, allegedly at the insistence of his sponsors Nike. Whatever had happened, Ronaldo would take to the field with the Brazilian team for the



June 27, 1998, Paris. Ronaldo in fine health, during Brazil's 4-1 win over Chile



July 8, 1998, Paris. France's Laurent Blanc is sent off for pushing Croatia's Slaven Bilic. Bilic went down unusually easily, meaning that Blanc would miss the World Cup Final.

Final, even though nobody, apart from a select few, had any idea whether he was in any fit state to play in the most important football game of 1998.

The almost farcical circumstances in which Brazil came into the Final did little to motivate or inspire Mario Zagallo's side. From the off, they seemed ill at ease and under-equipped to deal with a French side that were lifted by some huge home support. Though he had missed a couple of matches through suspension earlier in the tournament, Zidane's return had re-energised France and his performance in the Final was little short of astonishing.

On 25 minutes, he rose at the front post to head home an Emmanuel Petit corner to give the hosts a deserved lead and then, on the stroke of half-time, he repeated the trick, heading in a corner from the other side to double France's advantage. Brazil, meanwhile, were never at the races. Lethargic at times and strangely devoid of ideas, they posed little threat to Fabien Barthez's goal and nor did they suggest anything resembling a comeback, not even when France lost Marcel Desailly to a red card in the 68th minute.

AFTER DECADES OF FALSE DAWNS AND UNFULFILLED POTENTIAL, *LES BLEUS* HAD FINALLY ASCENDED THE SUMMIT OF INTERNATIONAL FOOTBALL.

With moments left on the clock and with the Stade de France in full voice, the host nation confirmed their victory with a third goal, as Arsenal's midfielder Emmanuel Petit clipped a precise shot past an advancing Taffarel. Fittingly, it would also be France's 1,000th goal in international football and, of course, the last goal in the World Cup Finals in the 20th century.

Paint the town blue

Later, as the French captain Didier Deschamps shook the hands of dignitaries at the trophy presentation, Laurent Blanc, the defender so cruelly denied a place in the Final, was pushed forward to stand side-by-side with his skipper.

It was a touching display of camaraderie and one, you would hope, that made Slaven Bilic feel ever so slightly ashamed of his actions. The scenes that greeted France's victory in Paris, meanwhile, were unlike anything seen in previous World Cup Finals.

The party was long and hard and lasted for days. Finally, after decades of false dawns and unfulfilled potential, *Les Bleus* had finally ascended the summit of international football and more than that – it felt right.

JAPAN & S.KOREA 2002

THERE WERE SHOCKS GALORE AS FOOTBALL OPENED ITS FRONTIERS TO ASIA. SOUTH KOREA AND TURKEY PROVED UNLIKELY CONTENDERS BUT THERE WAS NOTHING SURPRISING ABOUT THE YELLOW-SHIRTED WINNERS.



June 18, 2002, Daejeon. South Korea depose Italy.

Asia was the setting and shock, surprise and redemption were the themes as Brazil and a famous smiling number nine put the heartache of 1998 behind them to win their fifth World Cup title. In a tournament full of upsets, there was a familiar feel to the Finalists as international heavyweights Brazil and Germany battled it out on a warm June evening in Yokohama.

Four years earlier, mystery and intrigue surrounded Brazil's 3-0 loss to France in Paris, particularly the circumstances that led to Ronaldo first being dropped from the side, and then reinstated, following reports of a pre-match seizure. But by the time he'd scored his second goal of the Final and his eighth of the 2002 competition past a previously unbeatable Oliver Kahn, the Golden Boot winner laid to rest the ghost of Paris. As the seemingly ageless Cafu held aloft the trophy, the world could catch its breath following a frenetic tournament that had entertained, stunned and captivated from the off.

Two's company

Asia's first World Cup was also the first, and likely the last, to feature two hosts. Back in 1996, Japan and South Korea had began the bidding process as rivals along with Mexico. But when the two Asian countries decided to unite, they were unanimously chosen ahead of the Mexicans. South Korea's automatic qualification as hosts meant they would be making their fifth successive Finals, a record for a nation outside of Europe or the Americas (and incredibly, they have qualified for every World Cup since 2002). Conversely, co-hosts Japan would be making only their second appearance, while France would be the last defending champions to qualify automatically before FIFA changed their policy. As a sign of things to come, qualification threw



June 5, 2002, Ibaraki. Irish captain Roy Keane had been sent packing by manager Mick McCarthy yet Ireland picked up decent results.

up a number of new and rare participants. Turkey were back after last competing in 1954, Portugal ended a 16-year drought, while China, Ecuador, Slovenia and Senegal would all sample their first taste of the World Cup Finals. But none of the heavyweights had missed out, as all seven previous World Cup winners qualified.

The Gaul of it

With Japan hosting the Final, it meant that South Korea would have the honour of opening proceedings and it was the Olympic city of Seoul that witnessed the 17th World Cup Finals begin as it meant to go on, with an upset. It took Senegal only 30 minutes to knock France from their pedestal, as Papa Bouba Diop finished following El Hadji Diouf's left-wing trickery to ensure that manager Bruno Metsu would get one over his countrymen.

It would be the beginning of a miserable run for Roger Lemerre's World Cup and European Championship holders, as a 0-0 draw with Uruguay followed by a 2-0 defeat to Denmark saw them heading home inside 12 days, without a goal being scored.

They weren't the only high-profile casualties of the first round. While England fans must have cursed their luck when drawn in the tournament's "group of death" alongside Sweden, Nigeria and old foes Argentina, it only made their qualification ahead of Marcelo Bielsa's men even sweeter. An opening day draw against Sweden – England manager Sven Göran Eriksson's homeland – was followed by a pivotal 1-0 victory over Argentina. After his controversial sending off against the Argentinians four years earlier, fate left it to captain David Beckham to score the winner from the spot. A 0-0 draw with Nigeria in Osaka was enough to see England through, where they would face Group A winners Denmark.

CAPTAIN ROY KEANE HAD SENT THE IRISH CAMP INTO DISARRAY BEFORE A BALL HAD BEEN KICKED, ORDERED HOME AFTER OPENLY QUESTIONING THE SQUAD'S PROFESSIONALISM.

Only two sides qualified without dropping a point, Brazil scoring 11 goals in the process of brushing aside China, Costa Rica and runners-up Turkey, while Spain also had little trouble in Group B, where Paraguay nudged out South Africa on goals scored.

Japan and South Korea thrill

A cracking 3-2 win over Portugal in Suwon built the foundations for the USA's progress, who, to the delight of the home fans, finished second behind South Korea. The Koreans were yet to taste defeat, following a 2-0 opening day win over Poland with a 1-1 draw with the Americans before dumping out the fancied Portuguese with a 1-0 win in Incheon.

Unbelievably, Japan had also topped their own group with a similar-looking record, drawing with Belgium before beating Russia and Tunisia. Much to the organisers' delight, the hosts were not only holding their own, but thriving in front of jam-packed stadia.

Robbie's keen

Whether the giddy hosts were partying quite like the Irish fans is another matter. Mick McCarthy's men were back at the World Cup after missing out in 1998 and were certainly making headlines, on and off the pitch.

Captain Roy Keane had sent the Irish camp into disarray before a ball had been kicked, ordered home in disgrace by McCarthy after

openly criticising the manager and questioning the squad's professionalism.

The dismay in Ireland that greeted the news of their best player's omission soon dissipated however, as the Irish drew their opening match with Cameroon before a last-minute equaliser from Roy's namesake Robbie secured a point against the Germans. A comfortable 3-0 win against a weak Saudi Arabia saw them qualify at the expense of the Africans. The Irish would soon be heard chanting "There's only one Keano" – and it wasn't the one sulking back in Manchester.

Miroslav the merciless

Germany had been typically ruthless; their only points dropped being the two surrendered to McCarthy's battlers. That draw was sandwiched between an 8-0 demolishing of the desperate Saudis – featuring a hat-trick from Miroslav Klose – and a solid 2-0 win over Cameroon. Their 11 goals tied them with Brazil for the tournament's top scorers so far. Evidently, their respective paths had already been paved for a predictable collision course in the Final. But what happened in-between was anything but.

This would be the last World Cup to feature the so-called "golden goal", and this short-lived innovation would be the decider in two of the Round of 16 matches. Senegal were thankful to FIFA's inventive nature as a bobbled Henri Camara shot seemed lacking in lustre as it trickled past Magnus Hedman in the 104th minute to send Sweden out.

In Daejeon, the Koreans were also getting in on the act. The Italians were set to go through thanks to Christian Vieri's 18th minute header, but Seol Ki-Hyeon's 88th minute equaliser sent the game into extra-time before Ahn Jung-Hwan won it for the hosts with three minutes left.

The Italians were enraged, though, at what they felt were a number of incorrect calls from Ecuadorian referee Byron Moreno, in particular the sending off of Francesco Totti after adjudging the player had dived in the box to earn his second yellow. To make it worse for Giovanni Trapattoni's men, goalscorer and man of the match Ahn plied his trade in Italy's Serie A, for Perugia.

Referee's had better days

The Japanese weren't able to follow their fellow co-hosts' lead, losing to Turkey 1-0. But as Guus Hiddink's South Koreans marched on, so the shocks followed – not to mention the controversy.

Following Robbie Keane's second last-minute equaliser of the tournament, the Spanish were taken all the way to penalties by the spirited Irish before meeting the Koreans in the Quarter-Final. And José Camacho's side would soon join the Italians in screaming scandal as Egyptian referee Gamal Al-Ghandour controversially disallowed two Spanish goals as the game finished goalless.

Korea's K-League employed a quirky system where all drawn games would be decided on penalties, and having won all seven that he had been involved with in the previous season, keeper Lee Woon-Jae was in confident form.

June 21, 2002, Shizuoka. England keeper David Seaman can only watch on as a firecracker free-kick from Brazil's Ronaldinho hits the net for the winning goal in the Quarter Finals.


June 22, 2002, Gwangju. South Korea celebrate after their shoot-out win over Spain in the Quarter-Finals.

Sure enough, as his teammates showed remarkable composure in front of their expectant fans by not missing a single kick, Lee kept out Joaquin before Hong Myung-Bo fired home to continue the fairytale. Even a man as pragmatic as Hiddink began talking of dreams.

Germany lay in wait in the Semi-Finals. Their goal-laden group stage had been something of a red herring when it came to forecasting the manner in which Rudi Völler's men would make it to the Final, as they recorded successive 1-0 victories against Paraguay and the USA. First Oliver Neuville and then Michael Ballack were the goalscorers, but the real match-winner was Kahn. So impressive was he at protecting the German net that he would go on to become the first World Cup goalkeeper to be named player of the tournament.

Three Rs outclass Three Lions

If England had been solid yet unremarkable in making it to the last 16, their 3-0 hammering of the previously impressive Danes had certainly upped the ante. The real test would come in the Quarter-Final though, against the in-form Brazilians.

Boss Luiz Felipe Scolari hadn't had the easiest of times in charge of his country. He'd taken over exactly a year previously, with a misfiring Brazil in serious danger of not qualifying. Despite losing his first game to Uruguay, Brazil scraped through, but Scolari still felt the heat from fans for refusing to select veteran striker Romário. Instead, "Big Phil" was content to rely on his three other "R's" – Ronaldo, Rivaldo and Ronaldinho. His gamble, if it could even be seen as such, was paying off handsomely.

Despite going behind to Michael Owen's 23rd minute opener, Ronaldinho turned it round for his side. First, his powerful run set up Rivaldo for the equaliser before he somehow caught out a flapping David Seaman with a free-kick from 40 yards. Ronaldinho's eventful afternoon came to an early end with a red card for a foul on Danny Mills, but England failed to get back on level terms and a scintillating game in Shizuoka proved to be the last the World Cup would see of the Three Lions for another four years.

SCOLARI STILL FELT HEAT FROM FANS FOR REFUSING TO SELECT ROMARIO. "BIG PHIL" WAS CONTENT TO RELY ON HIS THREE OTHER "R'S" – RONALDO, RIVALDO AND RONALDINHO. HIS GAMBLE, IF IT COULD BE SEEN AS SUCH, WAS PAYING OFF.

The third golden goal of the tournament saw one surprise package see off another, as substitute Ilhan Mansiz's strike four minutes into extra-time ended the remarkable run of a tired Senegal side and sent Turkey into the last four. It was Turkey's best ever performance at a World Cup, while South Korea had become the most successful Asian team at a Finals. It meant the Semi-Finals took on a distinctly unusual look, and while the footballing powerhouses facing them were still expected to negotiate one final hurdle, they wouldn't be so foolish as to take anything for granted.

Turkey had lost narrowly against Scolari's side in their group encounter and were keen to avenge perceived injustices. In the previous game, following Ronaldo's equaliser just after half-time, Rivaldo scored a late winner from the spot, despite Alpay's foul on Luizão – for which the Turkish defender was red carded – occurring outside the penalty area.

Hackan Unsal was then shown a late red for kicking the ball at the goalscorer's leg, though Rivaldo's reaction – dropping to the floor clutching his face – would later earn him a fine as he became the first player punished in FIFA's crackdown on "simulation". With Ronaldinho out through suspension, the Turks were confident. But ultimately, Ronaldo's resurgence would not be halted by anyone, even the inspired Rüstü Reçber in the Turkish goal. Reçber had successfully repelled everything Brazil had thrown at him until "*Il Fenomeno*" muscled into the box and caught the keeper off guard with a clever toe poke in the 49th minute.

Never mind, Ballack

It had been the same scoreline a day earlier in Seoul, as Germany recorded their third successive 1-0 victory, ending South Korea's fortuitous but gutsy run in their home tournament. Ballack was again on the scoresheet, reacting quickest after his first shot was saved by Lee Woon-Jae, but the midfielder endured a bittersweet evening as a 70th minute yellow card, five minutes before his winning strike, meant that he would be sitting out of the Final.

Hiddink's charges were again sharp on the break and keen to attack, but found a resolute German backline in no mood to concede. On the few occasions they did make it through, Kahn was once again proving invincible, with a stop low down to his right from Lee Chun-Soo the pick of the bunch. This time, the South Koreans would not find late salvation, as the Germans, in their tenth World Cup Semi-Final, used all of their experience to great effect.



June 26, 2002, Saitama-Ken. Brazil's Ronaldo is all smiles as he scores for the second time in the Semi-Final against underdogs Turkey.



June 30, 2002, Yokohama. Brazil's 32-year-old captain Cafu lifts the trophy, but much praise must go to master tactician Scolari.

And so it was set up for a mouth-watering encounter in Yokohama. Brazil would be gunning for their fifth World Cup, while the Germans would be aiming to go level with their opponents on four. Despite their respective illustrious records, few pundits had picked either of these sides to make the Final before the tournament.

Brazil's struggles in qualifying were well documented, while Germany's current crop of players were widely acknowledged to be a level off some of their all-conquering predecessors and, unusually, they had needed a play-off against Ukraine to qualify, having even been humiliated 5-1 by England in Munich.

Normal service resumed

In Japan and Korea, though, Scolari and Völler had expertly manoeuvred their sides up through the gears. It may have been a tournament that had allowed football's underdogs to thrive, but there'd be nothing small time about the Final. Remarkably, despite being the tournament's two most consistently successful teams, this would be their first ever meeting at a World Cup.

The final had been inevitably billed as a battle between Kahn and Ronaldo. Whoever edged this personal duel would take the trophy. By half-time, Ronaldo had spurned three glorious chances, Kahn saving two from close range. The Brazilians had made most of the running, with Kléberson also twice coming close, hitting the bar from 20 yards with Kahn stranded.

THERE HAVE BEEN FEW WORLD CUPS WHERE ONE SIDE HAS DOMINATED QUITE LIKE SCOLARI'S BRAZIL.

But the striker with the famous toothy grin would not be denied in the second half. With his peculiar hairstyle appearing to point an arrow to goal, Ronaldo pounced on the rarest of occurrences, an Oliver Kahn mistake. Kahn uncharacteristically spilled a swerving drive from Rivaldo, and Ronaldo was on hand to put Brazil ahead in the 67th minute.

On the ropes

It was a devastating blow to the Germans who'd enjoyed their best spell in the match, Marcos tipping a superb Neuville free-kick on to the post only moments earlier. Twelve minutes later, the game was over. Kléberson's pass inside was wonderfully dummied by Rivaldo, allowing Ronaldo space to slot the ball past Kahn's despairing left hand.

Big Phil silences the doubters

There have been few World Cups where one side has dominated quite like Scolari's Brazil. They'd won every single game, never once needing extra-time or penalties – a World Cup first – and boasted the Golden Boot winner in Ronaldo, not to mention the runner-up, Rivaldo. Two-goal Ronaldinho would also make the FIFA all-star team.

This was a victory inspired by the three R's. There was redemption for Ronaldo's 1998 misery, not to mention retribution for Scolari over his many critics. And for their 32-year-old captain Cafu, there was long overdue recognition. Here was a man who was so often the unsung hero. He lifted the trophy aloft knowing he had become the first player to appear in three World Cup Finals – a feat not even the great Brazilian legends of yore, including Pelé, had managed to achieve.

RONALDO

Even though he retired from playing in 2011, there are probably still hundreds of defenders around the world still having nightmares about the time they faced Ronaldo.

Nicknamed *O Fenômeno* (The Phenomenon), Ronaldo was a wondrous one-off; lightning quick, awesomely powerful and blessed with the kind of insatiable appetite for goals, not to mention the ability to provide them, that you only see once in a generation.

Indeed, there have been few finer sights in the modern game than witnessing Ronaldo in full and frightening flow as he picks the ball up in midfield and drives his way forward, with opposition players trailing in his wake and, quite often, the goalkeeper left, finally, in a bewildered mess on the turf.

In a career that saw him play for PSV, Barcelona, Real Madrid and both of the Milan giants, his goalscoring exploits more than lived up to his nickname. And he certainly delivered for his country when it mattered too. In three World Cup Finals between 1998 and 2006, he plundered a total of 15 goals, and took the Golden Boot Award at the 2002 event where he scored eight, including both of the goals in the final win over Germany.

Though his later career was curtailed by injury, Ronaldo's impact on the game cannot be underestimated and the glut of individual awards that he garnered was testament to his greatness. The highlights? Three times FIFA World Player of the Year (in 1996, 1997 and 1998), two-time Ballon d'Or winner (in 1997 and 2002) and UEFA Club Footballer of the Year in 1998. His legendary compatriot, Pelé, even named him in the FIFA 100 list of the greatest living players in 2004 too. Put simply, he was the perfect centre-forward.



June 17, 2002, Kobe. Ronaldo celebrates after scoring Brazil's second goal in a 2-0 win against Belgium in the Round of 16.


9



GERMANY 2006

WITH HOME ADVANTAGE, JURGEN KLINSMANN'S GERMANY WERE FREE-SCORING POTENTIAL CHAMPIONS, BUT THE FINAL WOULD INVOLVE GERMANY'S NEIGHBOURS – A MATCH OVERSHADOWED BY A MOMENT OF ZIZOU MADNESS

With the scores tied at 1-1 and only seconds remaining in the first period of extra-time, France's captain and talisman lost his marker and rose majestically to meet a pinpoint cross from Willy Sagnol. Zinedine Zidane connected as perfectly as he had in Paris eight years earlier, when his two first-half headers had inspired the French to their first ever World Cup, and propelled Zidane into football's stratosphere.

With his bullet header goalbound, Zidane watched his destiny unfold. This, his final match before retiring from the game, would surely end in the most perfect of scenarios. Even at 34 years old, he had undoubtedly been the player of the tournament, showing the grace, poise and control of a true master of his craft. His seventh-minute penalty, a caressed dink off the underside of Gianluigi Buffon's crossbar, was a stunning show of impudence and class on the world's biggest stage, against the world's best goalkeeper.

Zidane denied

But Zidane's header did not trouble the back of the net in Berlin. Sixty-nine thousand fans in the Olympiastadion gasped as Buffon somehow managed to leap and claw the ball over the net. Zidane could not believe it. And then, an estimated 715 million people watching could not believe what happened next. Zizou's destiny would take a darker turn.

No joy for the usual suspects

It had been the first World Cup Final since 1978 – and only the second since 1938 – that neither Brazil nor Germany would be involved. As the host nation, Germany had charmed and entertained, and few would have begrudged the welcoming masses the enjoyment of seeing their team claim their fourth title.

The tournament had been such a success that most had forgotten just how lucky the Germans were to get it in the first place.

The bidding process in 2000 had proved to be a controversial affair. After rival nations Morocco and England were eliminated in the first two rounds of voting, Germany squared up against South Africa. On the eve of the vote, Oceania delegate Charles Dempsey pulled out of proceedings, citing "intolerable pressure" and concerns over his safety.

His expected vote for South Africa was lost and Germany triumphed 12-11. FIFA president Sepp Blatter would have had the casting vote in the event of a tie, and it was no secret that he was in favour of bringing the World Cup to Africa.

South Africa would get their chance four years later. This time it was a return to Europe after France last took charge in 1998, and of the 197 participating teams desperate to get there, only 32 would make the cut.

Holders have to qualify

As usual, the hosts were guaranteed a spot, but for the first time ever, the defending World Cup champions would not qualify automatically. Not that this seemed to overly concern 2002 winners Brazil, who finished top of the CONMEBOL standings alongside fellow South American giants Argentina. But while South America's representatives had a familiar look about them, there was a distinctly fresh feel to the rest of the June arrivals, with all six confederations represented for the first time since 1982.

Angola and Togo had seen off some of Africa's bigger sides to make it for the first time, while high expectations followed debutants Ivory Coast and Ghana given their bounty of top European-based talent.

Other debutants included Trinidad and Tobago, while Czech Republic, Ukraine and Serbia and Montenegro were making their first appearances as independent nations. And after defeating Uruguay on penalties in the CONMEBOL/Oceania play-off, Guus Hiddink's Australia would also be ending a World Cup drought of 22 years.

Worthy is the Lahm

Starting as they meant to go on, the Germans opened up the 18th World Cup with a breathless 4-2 win over Costa Rica. It took Philipp Lahm only six minutes to have Munich's Allianz Arena on their feet, the Bayern Munich left back cutting inside to curl in only his second international goal from the right corner of the box. Lahm's overlapping runs, and those of his opposite number Arne Friedrich, were a clear sign that if boss Jürgen Klinsmann was going to win this tournament on home soil, he was instructing his side to do it in some style.

As if to emphasise this point, even Germany's holding midfielder was getting in on the act, Torsten Frings scoring with a 35-yard rocket in the 87th minute to seal the game. Two goals from poacher Miroslav Klose had nudged his side back ahead after the ever-eccentric Paulo Wanchope had twice pulled Costa Rica back into contention. It was the highest-scoring opener in World Cup history, and a perfect start for a host nation that many forget were ranked way down in 19th place in FIFA's pre-tournament rankings.

Polish connections

Next came the visit of the Poles in Dortmund, a traditionally frosty relationship making for a heated tie. All the more galling for the



July 4, 2006, Dortmund. Italy's Fabio Grosso nets in the 119th minute against Germany in the World Cup Semi-Final. Moments later, Alessandro Del Piero would double the lead, sending Italy to their sixth Final.

underdogs – who'd failed to win any of their previous 14 meetings with Germany – was the fact that the opposition front line of Klose and Lukas Podolski were both born in Poland.

Unfortunately for any neutrals watching, a match that had the look and feel of a derby played out like one too, with few bursts of quality or moments of note before Radoslaw Sobolewski saw red in the 75th minute, prompting the Germans to force the issue.

Artur Boruc was proving an immoveable object in the Polish goal, while captain Michael Ballack and Klose both hit the bar in the dying minutes. Just when it looked as though Poland had clung on for a vital point, substitute Oliver Neuville slid in for the winner in the 91st minute.

The Germans didn't look back, comfortably beating the already-qualified Ecuador 3-0 to claim top spot, before two goals for Podolski inside the first 12 minutes saw off the Swedish in the Round of 16, who'd made it through Group A unbeaten in second place. The Germans had made it into the Quarter-Finals by scoring ten goals, shoring up what had looked a leaky defence from the opening game, conceding only one further goal.

Ronaldo back to his best

But they were not the only team showing good form. Germany's 2002 conquerors Brazil were flawless in Group F, with Ronaldo's two goals against Japan in a 4-1 rout bringing him level with Gerd Müller as the World Cup's all-time leading scorer.

Argentina and Holland managed to negotiate a tricky group with Ivory Coast and Serbia and Montenegro, though José Pékerman's side were scoring more freely than Marco Van Basten's, managing eight in total, five more than the Dutch. This included a ruthless 6-0 demolition of a hapless Serbia and Montenegro side, and while the likes of Lionel Messi, Carlos Tevez, Hernán Crespo and Maxi Rodriguez all got on the scoresheet, it was unlikely scorer Esteban Cambiasso who claimed arguably the goal of the World Cup, adding the final flourish to a flowing move that included 24 passes throughout this skilled Argentinian team.

Europe's big guns

The Spanish, with a seemingly unshakeable reputation for flattering to deceive at major tournaments, had similarly breezed through their group with three wins, as did Euro 2004 Semi-Finalists Portugal.

Eventual Finalists France had looked far from impressive as they stuttered their way past Togo in their final group game following two draws against South Korea and a defensively frugal Swiss side who didn't concede a goal in the tournament before heading out on penalties.

Under Marcello Lippi, the Italians were playing to their footballing stereotype, unspectacular but solid, qualifying unbeaten and conceding only the once. As for group stage flops, despite beginning with a 3-0 win over the Americans, the much-fancied Czech Republic failed to live up to their "golden generation" expectations, the USA crashed out with a single point, while Ghana were the only side from Africa to make it through, with their steely midfield duo of Michael Essien and captain Stephen Appiah showing themselves to be formidable opponents.

Meanwhile, Sven-Göran Eriksson's England side had survived an injury crisis to finish top of Group B. Eriksson had raised more than a few eyebrows when he opted to call up the inexperienced Arsenal teenager Theo Walcott at the expense of the Premier League's highest-scoring Englishman that season, Darren Bent.

The Swede later admitted that his decision was based more on instinct than logic – Tottenham's Jermain Defoe was also left out – but when Michael Owen crawled off the pitch after four minutes in England's final group game against Sweden with a cruciate ligament injury, Eriksson may have thought it one gut feeling he wished he'd ignored.

By that stage England were through, having beaten Paraguay 1-0 in their opening game thanks to a Carlos Gamarra own goal, and then eventually broken down a stubborn



June 16, 2006, Gelsenkirchen. Esteban Cambiasso puts Argentina two-up against Serbia and Montenegro. Argentina went on to win 6-0.



June 16, 2006, Berlin. France superstar Zinedine Zidane headbutts Marco Materazzi in what would be his final act for the national team.

Trinidad and Tobago with two late goals from Peter Crouch and Steven Gerrard.

The game with Sweden was to determine the group winner, and an entertaining 2-2 draw, featuring a stunning left foot opener from Joe Cole and a last minute equaliser from Henrik Larsson, was enough for England to lead the pack. In scoring Sweden's 51st minute equaliser, Marcus Allbäck marked the 2,000th goal in World Cup history.

We only have eyes for Roo

As Sweden's tournament came to an end against the hosts, England were preparing to face Ecuador, but without leading goalscorer Owen. Instead Wayne Rooney, not long back from a broken bone in his foot that had a nation praying, would lead the line up front.

At times he cut an isolated figure on his own as England struggled to offer the 20-year-old the support he desperately needed. Instead the winning goal came from their captain's speciality, a whipped in free-kick that missed everyone, including the Ecuadorian keeper. For the second time under Eriksson, Beckham and England were heading to the last eight of the World Cup.

In Leipzig, Argentina were also marching on, but their opponents Mexico had given them a real game. The tournament was beginning to rack up a fine collection of wonder goals, but Maxi Rodriguez's extra-time winner – a cushioned chest followed by a beautiful dipping volley – was the best of the lot. A valiant Mexican effort had not stopped the in-form Argentinians, cheered on in the stands by a topless Maradona, feverishly waving his blue and white shirt over his head.

Lack of discipline

As well as its propensity for stunning strikes, the tournament was slowly becoming infamous for its unprecedented number of cards. By the time the officials had packed up their bags and gone home, they had handed out a record 345 yellow and 28 red cards.

The last-16 tussle between Portugal and Holland certainly didn't help matters, in what became known as the "Battle of Nuremberg". Beleaguered Russian ref Valentin Ivanov was forced to show two reds to each side in an ill-tempered game marked by brawls and melees. Sixteen yellow cards were also handed out, while a tearful Cristiano Ronaldo had to be substituted in the 34th minute following a robust tackle from Khalid Boulahrouz, one of the four players who would later see red. In the midst of flying studs, headbutts and flailing arms, Portugal prevailed 1-0.

But it wasn't all down to the players' misbehaviour, as the performance of the match officials came under heavy scrutiny too. Premier League ref Graham Poll made a career-defining error, mistakenly showing three yellow cards to Croatia's Josip Simunic in their final group match against Australia before eventually sending the defender off. The ensuing furore meant a gutsy Australian performance – resulting in the Socceroos finishing second behind Brazil and ahead of Croatia and Japan – was largely overlooked.

Italy's shame becomes an advantage

More was to come for Guus Hiddink's battling Australia, when they were unlucky to exit the competition in the next round to a 95th minute Francesco Totti penalty. Many felt the spot-kick was harshly awarded, but few failed to admire the dogged spirit of the Italians, who had scraped a 1-0 win despite playing with ten men for 40 second-half minutes after Marco Materazzi's sending off.

Lippi's side were getting into a groove. Much had been made before the tournament of the *Calciopoli* scandal that had been uncovered just a month before the Finals. Some of Italy's biggest club sides had been implicated in a police investigation into match-fixing. But rather than cast a suffocating shadow over the national team, Lippi used the negative publicity to drum up a siege mentality in his squad, forging an impenetrable team spirit that served the Italians to the Final.



June 25, 2006, Nuremberg. In one of the most extraordinary fixtures ever played, the "Battle of Nuremberg" pitted Holland against Portugal. The game would see four players sent off. For the neutral, it made wonderful viewing.

Ukraine had posed few problems in the Quarter-Finals, as an early goal from Gianluca Zambrotta sent the *Azzurri* on their way before two second-half strikes from Luca Toni sealed a Semi-Final against Germany, whose flawless penalty-taking had seen them dump out the impressive Argentinians.

Elsewhere, Ronaldo had taken only five minutes against Ghana to overtake Gerd Müller as the greatest goalscorer the World Cup had ever seen. Put through superbly by Kaka, the Brazilian great turned back the clock as he sidestepped the goalkeeper to finish with typical relish. The Brazilians added a further two goals but Ghana exited their first World Cup with heads held high.

Have you any early flights to Madrid?
Two late goals from Zinedine Zidane and Patrick Vieira completed a 3-1 win for the French over Spain, who had once again choked, despite having taken the lead through the impressive young striker David Villa.

The two former winners Brazil and France met in the Quarter-Final, but not for the first time at a World Cup it was Zidane who outshone Ronaldo, the man of the match dictating proceedings and creating the winning goal, as an unmarked Thierry Henry met his captain's free-kick with a side-foot volley past Dida for the only goal of the match.

Like Italy, France were getting into gear at just the right time, combining defensive discipline with scintillating attacking play. But if the French and the Italians were doing what they did best, then so too were the English.

In their Quarter-Final against Portugal, England lost Beckham to injury just after the break, and when Rooney was sent off for a stamp on Ricardo Carvalho, there was an inevitability to England's reward for holding on being a crushing loss on penalties. Not only did keeper Ricardo become the first goalkeeper at a World Cup to save three penalties, but it was Cristiano Ronaldo who scored the winning kick, the man whose histrionics before Rooney's sending off did little to endear him to the English fans.

Not a South American in sight
For only the fourth time in history there would be an all-European Semi-Final line up. With the teams so evenly matched, both Semis proved tight affairs. With home advantage and 65,000 fans cheering them on in Dortmund's Westfalenstadion, the top scoring Germans had their sights firmly set on the Final. But the Italians had already proved themselves to be made of stern stuff, and it was only in extra-time, with the score 0-0, when the game came to life.

Aware of Germany's proficiency from the spot, Italy bucked the trend and went for an



July 10, 2006, Berlin. While most were coming to terms with Zinedine Zidane's violence, Italy lifed the trophy – their fourth World Cup triumph.

increasingly bold approach in extra-time, with Andrea Pirlo at the heart. It was his wonderful reverse pass in the 119th minute that found left back Fabio Grosso, whose first-time curling shot whizzed past Jens Lehmann and found the corner of the net. Grosso's contorting face as he reeled off, chased by his teammates, echoed Marco Tardelli's celebration in 1982.

In their forlorn attempt to rescue a fading dream, the Germans were caught on the break only seconds later, and Alessandro Del Piero's fabulous finish added a gloss to Italy's night in Dortmund.

Scolari's run comes to an end

In Munich, not even Ricardo's burgeoning reputation as a penalty-saving specialist could stop the unflappable Zidane, who struck the winning goal from the spot in the 33rd minute as the French booked their finale with Italy with a composed and deserved victory. It ended boss Luiz Felipe Scolari's 100 per cent record as a coach at the World Cup, having won 12 games in a row including his run in charge of Brazil four years earlier.

So it was that two teams largely unfancied even as late as the group stages found themselves pitted against each other in Berlin. Italy's progress had come despite scandal back home, while slow starters France had been inspired by their ageing maestro.

But while the final promised technical brilliance, goals were not expected in abundance from two sides keen to prioritise caution over carelessness. Yet by the 20th minute, two had already been scored.

Following Zidane's audacious penalty, Italy's own midfield virtuoso Pirlo flighted in a corner that was met by Materazzi, who out-jumped Vieira to power Italy back level. Luca Toni headed against the bar from another Pirlo dead ball before half-time, while the tireless Florent Malouda had a strong shout for a second penalty just after the break.

What on earth?

Extra-time arrived, and with it came Zidane's moment of lunacy. The French captain left no doubt that the line between genius and madness is a fine one as he leapt from one to the other in a matter of seconds.

With ten minutes left of extra-time to go, an off-the-ball incident saw a riled Zidane thrust his head into Materazzi's chest, knocking the goalscorer to the ground. After several moments of confusion, the referee was informed by his fourth official and duly produced a red. Moments earlier, Zidane's last act as a professional footballer had been so close to being a winning headed goal. Instead, it would be a head to the chest of an opponent. A brutal and shameful way to end what was an undeniably glittering career.

Someone has to miss

If the world watched on stunned, his France teammates failed to show it as they held on for penalties. David Trezeguet, the man who scored the golden goal against Italy at Euro 2000, was the only man to miss as his well-struck penalty cannoned back off the crossbar. Once again it was Grosso who kicked Italy into raptures.

Tunnel vision

The picture of Fabio Cannavaro lifting the trophy will be fondly remembered for years in Italy. Unfortunately for Zidane, the world will also remember one other lingering image from that evening in Berlin. That of France's famous number 10 trudging down the tunnel, with the World Cup trophy he had been so sure of lifting for a second time, positioned behind him, tantalisingly out of reach.



SOUTH AFRICA 2010

EUROPEAN CHAMPIONS SPAIN CLAIMED THEIR FIRST EVER WORLD CUP TITLE, BUT THIS TOURNAMENT WAS ABOUT MORE THAN ONE COUNTRY, AS A WHOLE CONTINENT REJOICED AT HISTORY BEING MADE IN AFRICA...

Six years and 26 days after Nelson Mandela had defied doctors' orders to travel to Zürich to learn that South Africa had been chosen to host the 2010 World Cup, South Africa's Siphiwe Tshabalala thundered in the opening goal of the first ever World Cup held on African soil.

Back then, the man known as "Madiba" had revealed to the 24 FIFA delegates in Switzerland that listening to football on the radio had been his only respite during 18 years imprisoned on Robben Island. Now, the 84,000 fans packed into Johannesburg's new Soccer City stadium erupted as one.

The unmistakeable din of vuvuzelas could be heard across the townships and FIFA Fan Fests all over the country, including one symbolically located 12 miles away in Soweto, the scene of the 1976 uprising during the worst of South Africa's apartheid regime.

Africa in the spotlight

While opponents Mexico would try their best to spoil the party with a late equaliser through Rafael Márquez, it had failed to dampen spirits or silence the vuvus. The Rainbow Nation had a new motto, *Ke nako*, Africa – Africa, it is time.

South Africa had, in fact, been the first World Cup hosts since Italy in 1934 to compete in the qualification preliminaries, due to quirky pragmatism on FIFA's part – the CAF section would double as the qualification for the 2010 African Cup of Nations. But despite failing to qualify from their group – finishing second – Carlos Alberto Parreira's side would not be missing out on their own party.

The hosts' unusual inclusion took the number of participating teams to a new high of 204 (from 208 FIFA members), meaning that the 2010 World Cup tied with the 2008 Olympics for the record number of competing nations in a sporting event.

Glamour draw

By the time actress Charlize Theron was joined in Cape Town by David Beckham to make the draw in December 2009, this number

June 11, 2010, Johannesburg. Siphiwe Tshabalala (second from the right) opens South Africa's account, leading to a special dance by the corner flag.



July 2, 2010, Johannesburg. Uruguay's Luis Suárez, no stranger to controversy, handles on the line in the Quarter-Final against Ghana and was soon sent off.

had been whittled down to 32. But it had not been without controversy. In the battle to represent Africa at its inaugural World Cup, old foes Algeria and Egypt had contrived to finish joint-top of their qualifying group, with identical head-to-head records.

Amid a hostile backdrop of attacks on team coaches, a play-off in neutral Sudan was arranged to decide who would join Cameroon, Nigeria, Ghana and the Ivory Coast. Algeria prevailed 1-0 through a goal by Antar Yahia of German club Bochum, meaning Algeria secured their first World Cup appearance since 1986. African champions Egypt would be staying at home.

Ireland are robbed

Meanwhile, on-field controversies dogged two other crucial play-offs. Costa Rica blamed poor officiating on their 2-1 aggregate exit at the hands of Uruguay, while the luck of the Irish was noticeably absent in their heated play-off with France where a deliberate handball by Thierry Henry in the build up to William Gallas' winning goal at the Stade de France was seen by everyone bar the three match officials.

Henry's *main de Dieu* provoked outrage and prompted the Irish, not to mention the penitent French captain himself, to call for a replay. FIFA's executive committee rejected the request, but when Sepp Blatter reiterated his refusal to consider video technology, the FIFA president could not have known that it was a portent of worse to come.

Again it was England bemoaning their luck at a major tournament, and this time it had nothing to do with penalties. The controversy came as Fabio Capello's men faced familiar rivals Germany in the Round of 16 after stuttering through Group C in underwhelming fashion. A Rob Green error in England's opening group game against USA saw a Clint Dempsey strike somehow slip through his grasp on a sticky night in Rustenburg, cancelling out Steven Gerrard's well-worked fourth minute opener. It would end 1-1.

Capello showed no mercy as Green was unceremoniously dropped for Portsmouth's David James – the tournament's oldest player at 39 years old – for the following game against Algeria, where a tepid 0-0 draw failed to match the eye-catching Table Mountain backdrop in Cape Town.

Anxious England

England would secure qualification with a nervy 1-0 win over Slovenia in Port Elizabeth thanks to Jermain Defoe's 23rd minute strike and some dogged second-half defending from John Terry. Crucially, though, Landon Donovan's late winner against the Algerians saw USA top the group, which left England facing the Germans.

The three-time winners had looked imperious in their opening game, a 4-0 thrashing of Australia, but a shock loss to Serbia followed by a narrow victory over Ghana suggested a tight affair was on the cards at Bloemfontein's Free State Stadium.

But when Lukas Podolski put Jogi Löw's side 2-0 up inside 32 minutes, this appeared far from the case. West Ham's Matthew Upson headed one back five minutes later, and when Frank Lampard's shot crashed off the underside of the bar, bounced well over the line and then out again, it seemed the scores would be level at the break. But the goal was not given. England, understandably, were incredulous.

But sympathy is not a trait often shown by German footballers at international

tournaments, and as England pressed for an equaliser in the second half, Thomas Müller, who'd had a highly successful season with Bayern Munich under Louis van Gaal, snaffled two goals in three minutes in a ruthless display of counter-attacking panache. While Blatter later took the unusual step of apologising mid-tournament for England's injustice, only the most delusional of Three Lions fans would have failed to accept that Capello's waning team had been beaten by a better, younger and more confident side.

Promising plenty of verve and swagger, Germany's Quarter-Final match-up with Diego Maradona's Argentina team looked set to be the pick of the tournament so far. With a pre-match repertoire of embracing each of his players in the tunnel, the boss was proving nearly as entertaining as his players, who had dominated Group B. Gonzalo Higuain's hat-trick against South Korea had been the highlight, while Nigeria and Greece were also brushed aside as the two-time winners notched seven goals and conceded just one before their 3-1 defeat of Mexico at the first knockout stage.

African farewells

Argentina's form was the pick of a full house of South American qualifiers, with Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay and Chile all making it through without a hitch. The same could not be said of Africa's full compliment. A pointless Cameroon crashed out bottom of Group E, Algeria's sole point came against England, while Nigeria suffered a similar fate at the foot of Group B. The Ivory Coast once again came unstuck in a tough group alongside Brazil and Portugal, despite beating North Korea 3-0.

The North Koreans were making their first appearance at a Finals since their Quarter-Final loss to Portugal at Goodison Park in England in 1966, but may have wished they hadn't bothered when that same country – this time with Cristiano Ronaldo in place of Eusébio – scored seven in their second game.

Bafana Bafana make buffoons of France

Back with the Africans, and most disappointingly of all saw the exit of the hosts on goal difference in Group A. With a point on the board and a first goal good enough to grace any World Cup, not to mention a celebration to match, Bafana Bafana had instilled a renewed belief within South Africa. Maybe the second-lowest ranked side in the competition (after North Korea) wouldn't be embarrassed after all.

Sadly for Perreira, who'd led Brazil to success in 1994, his team were then soundly beaten 3-0 by Uruguay in Pretoria. It was the heaviest defeat suffered by a host nation



July 3, 2010, Cape Town. Arne Friedrich scores the third in Germany's 4-0 stuffing of Argentina.


July 11, 2010, Johannesburg. English referee Howard Webb sends off Holland's No.3, John Heitinga, in the World Cup Final. He'd been a handful all evening.

in the first round, and it left South Africa clinging to the unlikeliest of scenarios in order to progress. They'd need to beat the out-of-sorts French, hope the Uruguayans defeated Mexico, and pray for a five-goal swing in the process. Yet, at half-time with the hosts 2-0 up, the French one man down following Yoann Gourcuff's red and Uruguay a goal to the good, a nation began to believe. Two further goals were needed, but only one came, and it was a consolation goal from Florent Malouda.

It had been a performance of grit, belief and, in Steven Pienaar and Katlego Mphela, no lack of style, but ultimately it wasn't enough. An Asamoah Gyan-inspired Ghana, second behind Germany in Group D, would be Africa's sole representatives in the ensuing knockout stages.

The mighty fall

Europe saw its share of shock exits too, most notably both World Cup Finalists from 2006, Italy and France. The *Azzurri* managed only two points and suffered the ignominy of finishing last behind an unbeaten New Zealand, while France's disarray on and off the pitch would have been gleefully enjoyed back in Dublin as news of player expulsions and training ground boycotts emanated from Raymond Domenech's dissenting squad. It meant that for the first time in World Cup history, the host nation and the previous tournament's finalists would not be appearing in the latter stages.

Swiss timing

There had been no such issue for the favourites. After a chastening 1-0 defeat to Switzerland in their opening encounter – only their second loss in the two years since their European Championships success – the Spanish would concede only once again in the whole tournament. The Swiss, meanwhile, had managed to set a new World Cup record of going nine hours and 19 minutes without conceding (a run stretching back to Germany 2006), surpassing Italy's previous record of nine hours and ten minutes.

They were not the sort of stats the neutrals wanted to hear, and with suggestions of questionable flight and bounce surrounding the official Adidas Jabulani ball, it was again left to the free-scoring Germans to show the rest of the world how it was done as, in the Quarter-Finals, they scored four goals for the third time in the tournament.

An early goal for eventual Golden Boot winner Thomas Müller meant the Germans could once again soak up the pressure and punish on the break, and by full-time Diego Maradona was left to reflect on Argentina's biggest World Cup humbling since 1974's 4-0 loss against Holland, as Arne Freidrich and two for Miroslav Klose completed the rout without reply.

Lifted by the generous support of the host nation, Ghana had continued to fly the flag for Africa in thrilling fashion, needing extra-time before Gyan outmuscled the USA defence to power the West Africans through.

Yet another Hand of God

Ghana's Quarter-Final opponents Uruguay had remained under the radar with quiet progress through their group and then past the South Koreans. That was until a blatant handball would again come to dominate the headlines. This time, the hand belonged to Luis Suárez, not Thierry Henry, and there was little chance of the match officials failing to notice. With the match poised at 1-1 and

heading for penalties, Luis Suárez handled a goal-bound header from Dominic Adiyiah, and left the pitch crying following his sending off. Tears of remorse had barely reached his cheek before they turned to joy, as Gyan's penalty struck the crossbar and the match headed for a shoot-out. Despite Ghana's star man having the nerve to take – and score – one of the five penalties, captain John Mensah and, ironically, would-be goalscorer Adiyiah could not, cruelly ending The Black Stars' quest to become the first African nation to make the World Cup Semi-Finals.

Easy Sneijder
Earlier that day, Port Elizabeth's Nelson Mandela Bay Stadium was awash with orange and yellow as Brazil and Holland took centre stage. In his attempt to become only the third man to win the tournament as player and coach, Dunga had shed some of Brazil's famous samba flair in favour of a more rigid spine. Solid if unremarkable progress in the tournament so far, and a 1-0 half-time lead, suggested it might just pay off. But two second-half goals from Holland's master craftsman, Wesley Sneijder, turned the tie on its head and any chance of Brazil's advance came to an end upon Felipe Melo's red card for an unseemly stamp on Arjen Robben in the 73rd minute.

Villa instinct
Having dumped out Iberian rivals Portugal in Cape Town, Spain completed the Semi-Final line-up with a second straight 1-0 victory, this time over plucky Paraguay. They had their captain and goalkeeper Iker Casillas to thank for saving Oscar Cardozo's penalty before Xabi Alonso missed a re-taken spot kick only minutes later. David Villa's 83rd minute winner sealed a Semi-Final tie against Germany.

Faced with criticism of his side's conservative approach, Spanish coach Vicente del Bosque admitted to the media that they had failed to reach the heights expected of them, and conceded that their German opponents had been the best performers so far. In private, though, Del Bosque must have known that keeping the counterattacking Germans at bay for as long as possible would remain Spain's best chance of progressing to their first ever World Cup Final. Sure enough, Löw's side – inhibited by the memory of the Euro 2008 Final loss to Spain two years prior – failed to reach their high-tempo best, with a 73rd minute Carlos Puyol header proving the difference.

Holland, meanwhile, had ensured it would be an all-European affair with a 3-2 victory over the Uruguayans thanks to goals from skipper Giovanni Van Bronckhorst, Sneijder and Robben. Uruguay were without the banned Luis Suárez, who had resumed his role of pantomime villain and enraged a continent by declaring that he'd made the "save of the tournament" against Ghana.

There would have been few sympathisers falling on the side of the Ajax striker as Uruguay headed out, but it was hard not to feel aggrieved for Diego Forlán, whose pulsating performances in attack would earn him the crown of 2010's best player.

Surely this time, Holland
So it was the Dutch heading to their first final since 1978, with boss Bert Van Marwijk having masterminded a flawless 14-game winning run, qualification included. The Spanish were looking to become the first European champions to lift the World Cup



July 11, 2010, Johannesburg. With minutes left of extra-time in the World Cup Final, Andrés Iniesta of Spain dispatches the Dutch.


July 11, 2010, Johannesburg. Spain's Sergio Ramos gets his hands on the FIFA World Cup trophy. Spain had become the eighth nation to win the World Cup.

since Germany managed to secure the double in 1974.

Despite their footballers failing to impress, England would also be represented, as Premier League referee Howard Webb was given the honour of officiating the Final, the first Englishman to do so since Jack Taylor (a butcher from Wolverhampton) took charge in Munich 36 years earlier.

Arresting football

The former South Yorkshire police sergeant had his hands full. Webb dished out a record 14 yellow cards and one red, as a promising finale descended into a fiery kicking match. Intent on not affording the same respect that Germany had granted the Spanish in the Semi-Final, the Dutch went clogging, with Mark van Bommel, Nigel de Jong and John Heitinga the worst offenders.

It was hard to argue with Spain's protestations that De Jong's 28th minute caution, following a studs-high challenge into Xabi Alonso's chest, was worthy of a straight red, but Webb managed to avoid reaching for his back pocket until the 19th minute of extra-time following Heitinga's second appearance in the book. Before then, Holland's attempt to rattle Spain's midfield metronomes Xavi and Andrés Iniesta had been almost as effective as it was ugly.

Del Bosque's side were typically frugal with possession but failed to find the space behind a robust Dutch back line. Holland's player of the tournament, Sneijder, did just that when his excellent through ball set Robben free in the 60th minute, but could only watch and wince as the clearest chance of the game was repelled by the outstretched boot of the man who would later lift the trophy.

REFEREE HOWARD WEBB DISHED OUT A RECORD 14 YELLOW CARDS AND ONE RED, AS A PROMISING FINALE DESCENDED INTO A FIERY KICKING MATCH.

Brawn slippy

Iker Casillas must have been readying himself for penalties when substitute Cesc Fàbregas fed Iniesta with two minutes of time left on Webb's watch. The unflappable playmaker took one touch and hammered a right-foot shot past Ajax's Maarten Stekelenberg.

The 84,490 in Soccer City, Johannesburg had waited almost two hours to see a goal and this one was a corker. Spain had won their maiden World Cup, the eighth side to do so, and the first national side to win from outside of their continent.

Del Bosque's side had been rewarded for their refusal to be bullied by a bruising Dutch side. The total amount of yellow and red cards in this encounter was more than double the previous record from the 1986 Final. But there was no question that the Final had failed to live up to expectations. It was another slim victory for Spain, whose goal tally of eight was the lowest of any world champions in history. The delirious Spanish didn't care, though. And nor, for that matter, did the South Africans.

Africa, it is time

Their highlight had unquestionably come just before kick-off, when a 91-year-old Nelson Mandela made his way on to the Soccer City pitch. Supported by his wife, his beaming grin belied his frailty as he soaked up the applause. The crowd's rapturous response said it all – *Ke nako,* Africa.

Africa, and South Africa, had delivered, and once again they had their anti-apartheid hero in their hearts.

June 24, 2014, Cuiabá. Colombia's standout player James Rodriguez scores his team's fourth against Japan. He'd win the Golden Boot.



BRAZIL 2014

WHEN BRAZIL LANDED THE RIGHTS TO HOST THE 2014 WORLD CUP FINALS, EVERYONE KNEW IT WAS GOING TO BE A TOURNAMENT TO REMEMBER – BUT AT TIMES, THIS WAS ONE WAS OFF THE SCALE.

It seemed like one of those bizarre sporting anomalies. Brazil, a nation that had become synonymous with World Cup success, hadn't staged the event for 64 years. So when FIFA announced, in March 2003, that the 2014 tournament would return to South America for the first time since the 1978 Finals, it was almost inevitable that Brazil would be in pole position.

Confirmation duly arrived in October 2007. Colombia, Brazil's only other rival as hosts, had officially withdrawn its bid in April of that year, leaving Brazil unchallenged as the only candidate left in the running. Since they last hosted the event in 1950, Brazil had not only learned to embrace the competition but had come to dominate it too, establishing themselves as the most successful side in the event's history by winning the title a record five times. Now, having won the World Cup in Sweden, Chile, Mexico, the United States and Japan, they had the opportunity to win it where it mattered most.

In the aerosol tonight

For the first time, and after the farrago of Frank Lampard's "goal" for England versus Germany in the 2010 World Cup, FIFA had sanctioned the use of goal-line technology at the Finals and armed their referees with vanishing foam spray to ensure defending walls were in the right place. So what is vanishing foam? Typically, a can contains 80 per cent water, 17 per cent butane and 2 per cent vegetable oil. There would also be cooling breaks if the temperature was over 32°C.

The draw was made in Bahia, a Brazilian resort, in December 2013. It threw up some intriguing combinations with Group G featuring Germany, the United States, Portugal and Ghana quickly being billed as the "group of death". Elsewhere, hosts Brazil pulled Mexico, Croatia and Cameroon, while the reigning champions Spain drew Holland, Chile and Australia.

It would prove to be a draw that was disastrous for the holders, Spain. Their opening game against a resurgent Dutch team showed a side that was long past its best.

Though Vicente del Bosque's Spain had taken the lead through a Xabi Alonso penalty, they were blown away by a rampant Holland who rattled in five goals to consign the world champions to the worst possible start to their title defence.

It was a breathtaking performance by Louis van Gaal's team and brought comparisons to the "Total Football" played by the Dutch sides of the Seventies.

The pick of the goals came from the Manchester United striker Robin van Persie who threw himself headlong at a Daley Blind crossfield pass to head home from 15 yards, the ball looping up and over the Spanish keeper and captain Iker Casillas. It was a goal that defied belief and, for that matter, most of the laws of physics too.

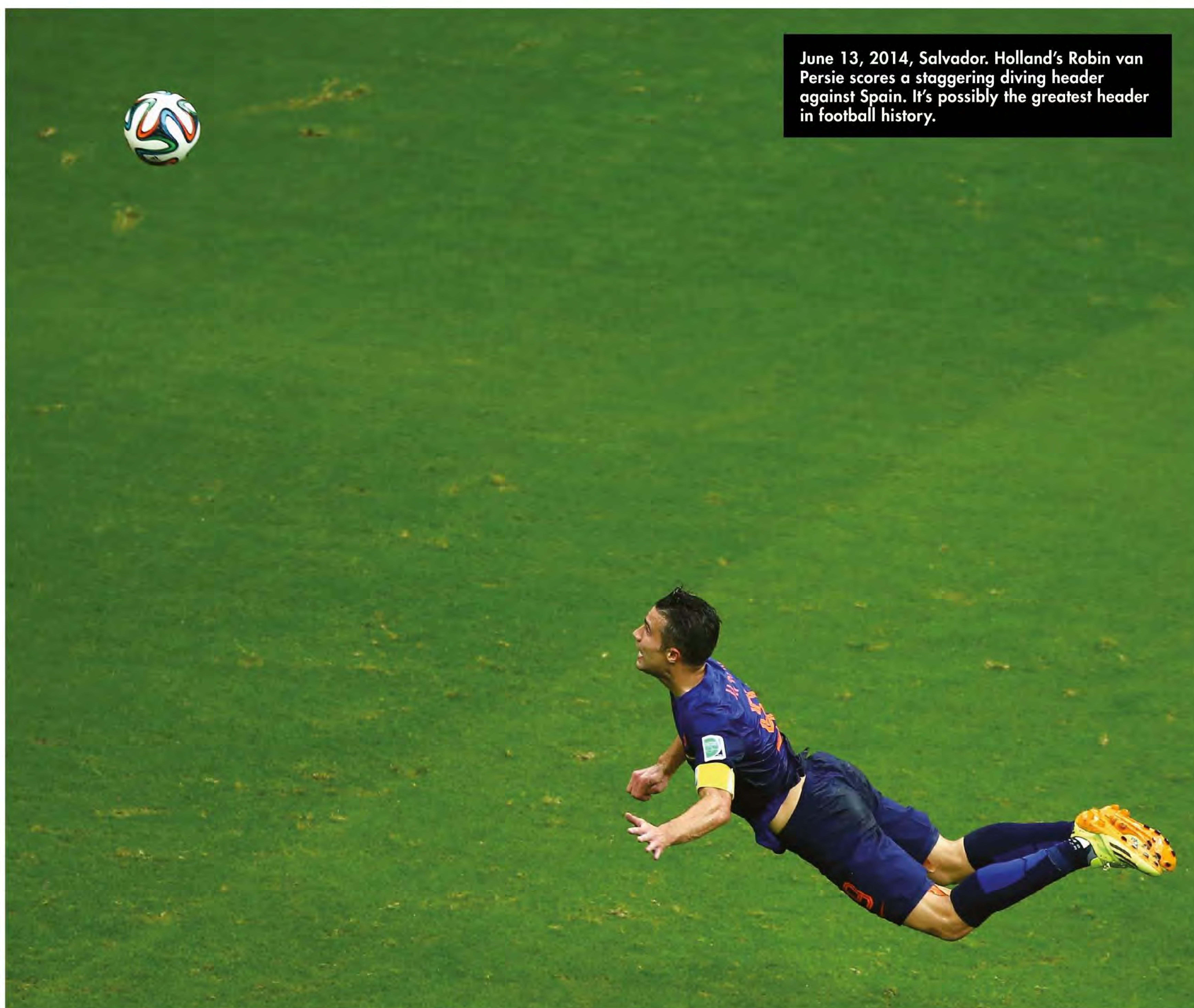
SPAIN WERE BLOWN AWAY BY A RAMPANT DUTCH SIDE WHO CONSIGNED THE HOLDERS TO THE WORST POSSIBLE START TO THEIR TITLE DEFENCE.

England, meanwhile, had breezed through a qualification group with Ukraine and Poland, remaining unbeaten over the course of their ten games. But it would count for nought when the team reached Brazil. Drawn in a group alongside the 2006 champions Italy, Uruguay and Costa Rica, it was always going to be tough to progress but few people foresaw just how risible England would be under Roy Hodgson.

Absolute rubbish

In their opening game against Italy in the jungle of Manaus, England were felled 2-1, the winner coming from the maverick former Manchester City striker Mario Balotelli.

Five days later, they lost 2-1 again, this time to Uruguay, with both goals scored by Luis Suárez who, remarkably, was still recovering from knee surgery, leading many to doubt whether he would even play in the tournament.



June 13, 2014, Salvador. Holland's Robin van Persie scores a staggering diving header against Spain. It's possibly the greatest header in football history.

But he did. Capitalising on some predictably dreadful defending from England, Suárez headed Uruguay into a first-half lead before Wayne Rooney levelled matters with a quarter of an hour to play. Ten minutes later, however, Suárez latched onto a simple long ball over the top before hammering it past Manchester City and England keeper Joe Hart to give Uruguay all the points. England's hopes hung in the balance and when Costa Rica surprised Italy, winning 1-0 in Recife, they were out at the earliest possible opportunity.

AS GIORGIO CHIELLINI GOT TO HIS FEET, HE PULLED BACK THE SHOULDER OF HIS SHIRT TO REVEAL TEETH MARKS.

If the headlines garnered by Luis Suárez in the wake of the England game had been overwhelmingly positive, they were in direct contrast to the ones he was about to receive after Uruguay's final group game against Italy.

Biting talk

While a dramatic late winner from defender Diego Godin gave Uruguay second place in the group, knocking Italy out in the process, the game was overshadowed by an incident in the 79th minute when Suárez tangled with Giorgio Chiellini in the Italian penalty area, causing both men to fall to the turf. As Chiellini got to his feet, he pulled back the shoulder of his shirt to reveal teeth marks, alleging that he had been bitten by Suárez.

While Suárez maintained his innocence, and wasn't even booked for the clash, replays showed the Uruguayan clearly sinking his teeth into the Italian defender's shoulder. But he had form. Indeed, it was the third time he had bitten an opponent in his career. Two days later, FIFA's Disciplinary Committee banned Suárez for nine international matches – the longest ban in World Cup history.

The furore that followed overshadowed what was a remarkable achievement by Costa Rica. Considering they were the whipping boys of Group D, they'd not only made it through to the last 16 but had also won the group, winning two games and drawing one.

The pain in Spain

It wasn't the only surprise of the opening round. Out went the holders Spain as Holland and Chile progressed from Group B but the other groups all went to form with Germany, France, Colombia, Argentina and Belgium all topping their groups.

For the first time since the Round of 16 was introduced in 1986, all of the group winners



June 13, 2014, Natal. Luis Suárez of Uruguay has hurt his teeth after sinking them into Italian defender Giorgio Chiellini. He would be banned for nine international games.


FOOTBALL FOR HOPE
FIFA
L. SUAR



July 13, 2014, Rio de Janeiro. In extra-time, Germany's Mario Götze celebrates the only goal in the 2014 Final. In reality, Germany had countless chances to win the game.

would win their Second Round knockout games to make the Quarter-Finals. But they would be close encounters with five needing extra-time and two requiring penalties to decide them.

South American scorcher
The game of the round would take place in Belo Horizonte where hosts Brazil faced Chile. Goals in normal time from the left knee of David Luiz and the lethal right boot of Alexis Sánchez saw the game head into extra-time. With seconds before a penalty shootout, Chile came agonisingly close to shattering the dreams of 200 million people as Mauricio Pinilla hit the crossbar but it was left to Brazilian keeper Júlio César to save the day for the host nation, saving two spot-kicks to send Luis Felipe Scolari's side through to the last eight.

As with every World Cup Finals, new names were being made and superstars born. Colombia, for example, unleashed James Rodriguez on the watching world and the Monaco midfielder delivered in spades, providing three assists and winning three man-of-the-match awards in the four games he played. Rodriguez also scored six goals to claim the tournament's Golden Boot award, one of which also won the FIFA Puskás Award for the goal of the tournament. It came in the last 16 victory against Uruguay when, in the 28th minute, he cushioned the ball on his chest 25 yards out before swivelling on the spot and crashing a spectacular volley in off the underside of the bar.

Van Gaal's tactical nous
The Quarter-Final between Holland and Costa Rica, meanwhile, would be decided by an inspired piece of management by Dutch coach Louis van Gaal. With the game tied at 0-0 and deep into extra-time, Van Gaal swapped his goalkeepers, with Tim Krul coming on for Jasper Cillessen for the penalty shootout, the idea being that, statistically, Krul was better at saving spot-kicks than his colleague. It worked. As Krul faced down each of the Costa Rican players, walking up to the penalty spot as they placed the ball down and staring them out, the Dutch scored all four of the penalties and watched on as Krul kept out two from the opposition. Costa Rica's wonderful run in the competition was over.

Victory but at a cost
Colombia's progress in the event, meanwhile, would eventually be halted by Brazil in a compelling and, at times, ugly Quarter-Final in Fortaleza. With an opening goal from Brazil skipper Thiago Silva and a stunning free-kick from David Luiz, Brazil were coasting to victory until a James Rodriguez penalty ten minutes from time produced a nailbiting climax. But Brazil's win would come at a cost. Though their dream of a World Cup win on home soil remained alive, they had lost their captain Thiago Silva, his yellow card earning him a one-match suspension, and, more tellingly, their talismanic attacker Neymar, his vertebra fractured by the knee of Juan Zúñiga.

Barcelona star Neymar had featured in all of Brazil's games, scoring four times and proving that there was so much more to his game than hype and an unusual haircut.



July 13, 2014, Rio de Janeiro. Bastian Schweinsteiger of Germany lifts the World Cup. After humiliating hosts Brazil in the Semi-Final 7-1, anything other than a Germany victory would have been wrong.

But while his absence was always going to be felt by Brazil, nobody could have foreseen what was about to happen when they faced Germany in the Semi-Final in Belo Horizonte on July 8.

Crazy football

Like Brazil, Germany were also undefeated in the tournament but Joachim Löw's side laid waste to Brazil in a first-half so bewildering, it was scarcely believable. Within half an hour, Germany had scored five and Brazil weren't just reeling, they were out on their feet. Later, some German players had admitted that they had decided at half-time to go easy on Brazil, lest they embarrass them on their home soil.

Some chance. Two more goals followed after the break and by the time Oscar grabbed a consolation goal late on, the humiliation had long since been completed. The 1-7 scoreline, was not only the most goals in a World Cup Semi-Final but it was also Brazil's biggest ever losing margin and their first loss at home in a competitive fixture since 1975. And somewhere, lost in the scramble for the record books, was a 16th World Cup Finals goal for Miroslav Klose, thereby beating the record of the Brazilian striker Ronaldo.

Familiar feel

Germany's opponents in the Final, for a third time, would be Argentina who had edged out Holland in the other Semi-Final, winning 4-2 on penalties after it had ended goalless after extra-time. It had been another close call for the Dutch but, again, they had fallen short and their maiden win in the World Cup would have to wait.

The Final would take place at Rio de Janiero's legendary Estadio do Maracanã on July 13, the crowd of a little under 75,000 in stark contrast to the 200,000 that watched the last World Cup Final to be held at this iconic stadium. Chances would be at a premium.

Gonzalo Higuain wasted Argentina's best chance in the first-half while Germany's Benedikt Höwedes saw his header come off the upright just before the interval. And, strangely, Argentina's talisman, Lionel Messi, failed to rise to the occasion.

For the third World Cup Final in a row, the match would go to extra time and would only be settled in the 113th minute when the Bayern Munich midfielder Mario Götze controlled André Schürrle's cross on his chest before hooking it past Sergio Romero with a neatly-taken volley.

It had been a tight and largely uneventful Final, glaringly at odds with the compelling nature of the other 63 games but Germany were deserving winners and in claiming their fourth title, they had also become the first European team to win the World Cup in the Americas.

Football carnival

The Semi-Final aberration against Germany aside, Brazil had done the World Cup proud, delivering a Finals that was as entertaining as any in recent memory.

From goals to gaffes, incidents to accidents and much more beside, it had been one long party for anybody lucky enough to pay the World Cup a visit.

But then everyone always knew it would be.



RUSSIA 2018

A CONTROVERSIAL CHOICE AS HOSTS, RUSSIA SURPRISED THE WORLD BY STAGING A PEACEFUL AND INCLUSIVE TOURNAMENT THAT WOULD SEE FRANCE EMERGE VICTORIOUS.

It is no exaggeration to say that FIFA's announcement in 2010 that Russia would be hosting the 2018 World Cup was both surprising and widely unpopular. Howls of derision and accusations of corruption immediately followed the news, along with grave warnings from prominent figures about the hooliganism and racism that permeated Russian football. Yet FIFA remained unmoved, standing by its decision to trust Vladimir Putin's vows that the slightest hint of trouble during the tournament would be ruthlessly crushed.

Despite such assurances, suspicions of both football's governing body and Russia's ability to stage a peaceful and inclusive World Cup remained when the hosts opened proceedings on June 14 with a 5-0 demolition of Saudi Arabia. It would in fact prove to be an eventful opening to a month-long festival of football since hailed as one of the finest World Cups in recent memory.

Putin on a show

The first few days of the group stages offered little in terms of surprises (Argentina's 1-1 draw with debutants Iceland aside) as Croatia and Brazil impressed and Spain and Portugal played out an enthralling Iberian derby that finished 3-3, a late Cristiano Ronaldo free-kick snatching a point for Portugal and completing a hat-trick for the Juventus-bound forward. But fans didn't have to wait long for an upset.

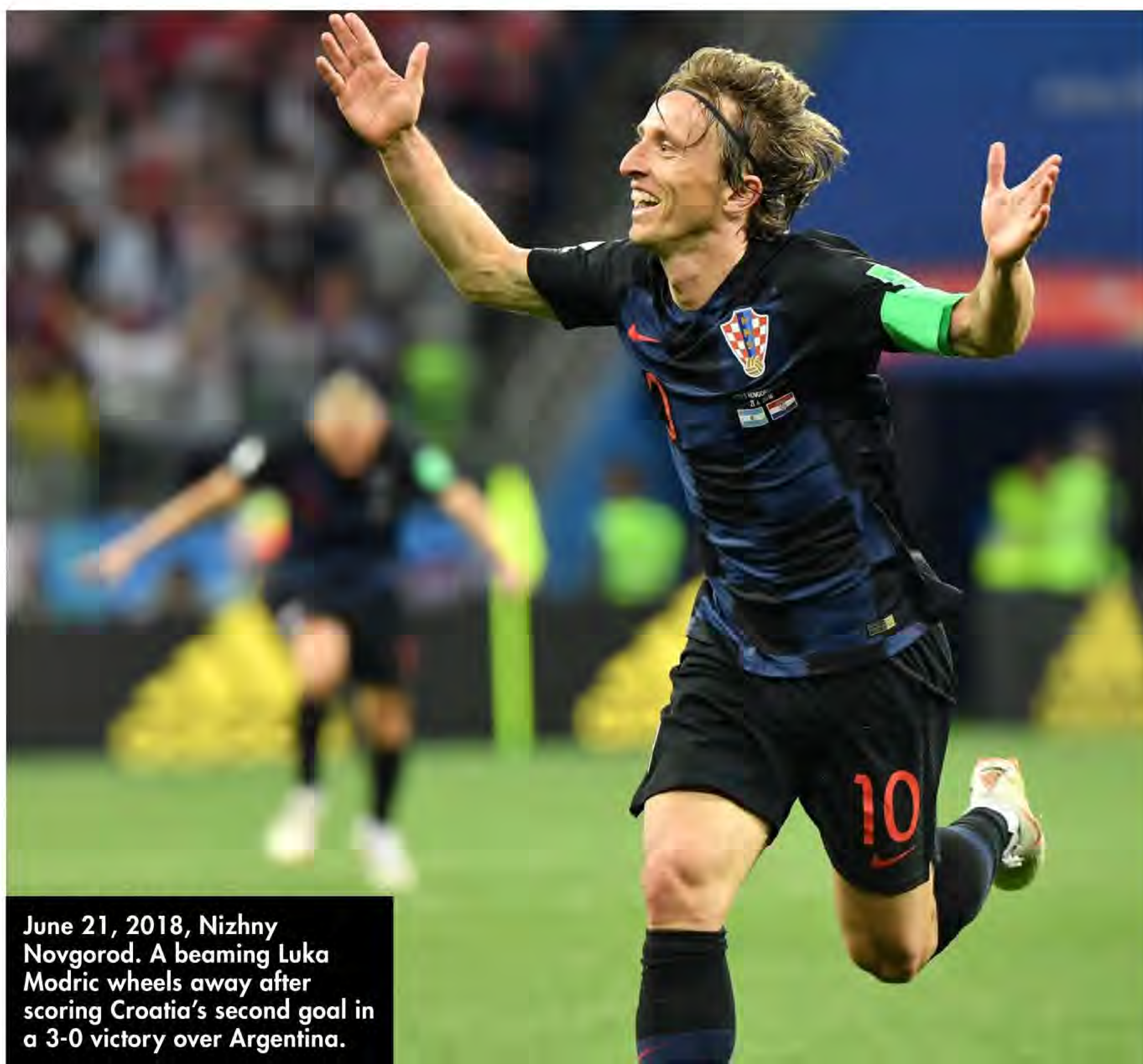
Placed in Group F alongside Sweden, Mexico and South Korea, holders Germany had every right to expect to brush their first-round opponents aside en route to the Round of 16. After all, they had not failed to reach at least the Semi-Finals of a World Cup since 1998 in France. Unfortunately for them, Mexico hadn't read the script, Hirving Lozano's close-range effort condemning Joachim Löw's charges to a shock 1-0 defeat.

With early favourites France having scraped past a stubborn Australia the day before, all eyes now turned to Group H, featuring a much-fancied Belgium, Gareth Southgate's England, plus Tunisia and World Cup first-timers Panama.

June 30, 2018, Kazan. Kylian Mbappé sprints clear of Argentina's Nicolás Tagliafico during a tumultuous Round of 16 clash in which the teenager announced himself to the world.



June 14, 2018, Moscow. Russia celebrate their third goal in a 5-0 opening-day thrashing of Saudi Arabia.


June 21, 2018, Nizhny Novgorod. A beaming Luka Modric wheels away after scoring Croatia's second goal in a 3-0 victory over Argentina.

As expected, Roberto Martínez's Belgium made light work of the Central Americans, who managed to keep the game goalless until early in the second half before succumbing to a Dries Mertens strike. A brace from Romelu Lukaku wrapped up a routine 3-0 win.

England's opening fixture would prove to be far from straightforward. A typical poacher's finish from skipper Harry Kane punished Tunisia's failure to deal with an early corner, but the Africans soon levelled from the spot ten minutes before the interval thanks to an infringement from Kyle Walker. A second half in which England laboured tirelessly but created little ticked into stoppage time with the scores level, Southgate's side looking set for a frustrating evening. A late corner provided them with a final chance. Kieran Trippier whipped the ball into a crowded box for Harry Maguire to flick it towards the far post, where Kane ghosted in to nod home a crucial winner and ignite the Three Lions' campaign.

Chaos in Kazan

After an eventful first week of action, the groups began to settle down and largely play out as anticipated, although the traditional heavyweights (bar Italy, who were absent for the first time in 60 years) were made to fight for progress into the knockout stage.

Following their scintillating opener, both Spain and Portugal slogged their way to five points apiece, Morocco and Iran offering stout resistance. Elsewhere, Lionel Messi's star-studded yet fragile Argentina fared even worse; thrashed 3-0 by an irresistible Croatia, the South Americans only clawed their way into the next round courtesy of a hard-fought 2-1 victory over Nigeria. Yet the shock of the tournament was still to come.

With Uruguay, France, Colombia, Belgium and England ultimately breezing into the Round of 16, it seemed logical to expect four-time winners Germany to overcome their Mexican setback and add their name to the burgeoning list of knockout contenders. Sure enough, a last-gasp 2-1 win over Sweden set them on course to do just that. Only South Korea now stood between the holders and a mouth-watering clash with Brazil. However, as Mexico had found before them, South Korea refused to roll over and accommodate their illustrious opponents.

Inspired by Son Heung-Min, the Koreans ably neutralised Löw's side before hitting them twice on the counter in stoppage time to condemn Germany to a stunning 2-0 defeat and a first group-stage exit since 1938.

Remarkably, the same stadium would witness further drama just three days later when France collided with Argentina. The form of both teams suggested that a tight, cagey affair was in store. In reality, the lucky fans crammed into the Kazan Arena were about to watch the game of the tournament and arguably one of the most captivating knockout clashes in World Cup history.

The game was only 12 minutes old when Mbappé tore through the Argentine back line towards goal, leaving Marcos Rojo little option but to wrestle him to the turf and concede a penalty. Up stepped Antoine Griezmann to coolly convert his second successful spot kick of the competition.

Behind but unbowed, Argentina composed themselves and began to gain a foothold in a match that had looked set to run away from them. Their efforts were rewarded on 41 minutes when a sumptuous long-range strike from Ángel Di María nestled in the top-left corner of Hugo Lloris's net. Jorge Sampaoli's men then dared to edge ahead shortly after the break through a slightly fortuitous Gabriel Mercado flick.

Evidently galvanised by falling behind, France wasted little time in restoring parity, this time through an exquisite volley from Benjamin Pavard. At 2-2 the stage was set for someone to become a national hero. That someone turned out to be 19-year-old Mbappé.

Unable to handle his raw pace throughout the encounter, Argentina simply had no counter to Mbappé's probing runs and elastic ball control. Just after the hour mark they paid the price, Mbappé smartly ending a game of penalty-box pinball by skipping past two defenders and slamming the ball underneath Franco Armani. Four minutes later he would put the contest beyond doubt, latching on to a perfectly weighted through ball from Olivier Giroud before hammering past an exposed Armani to make it 4-2. Sergio Agüero's stoppage-time header would prove to be nothing but a consolation.

Hosts with the most

The continued presence of the host nation always elevates a World Cup, keeping native fans interested and giving others a second team to follow. By finishing second in Group A and thereby reaching the Round of 16, Russia had achieved the bare minimum expected of a host and avoided embarrassment on the global stage. Anything beyond that would be an incredible bonus. Fortunately for the originally nicknamed 'The Team', a particularly forgiving Spain awaited them in the next round.

Ranked 60 places below the 2010 World Cup winners and the weakest side left in the tournament, Russia knew they faced a colossal task, and a 12th-minute own goal from Sergei


July 3, 2018, Moscow. England players engulf Jordan Pickford after their historic penalty shoot-out win over Colombia.

Ignashevich certainly didn't help their cause. But the local fans inside the Luzhniki Stadium remained undaunted, cheering the hosts on despite seeing Spain dominate possession. Their belief was rewarded shortly before half time when Artem Dzyuba levelled from the spot after a handball by Gerard Piqué.

Frustrated at being pegged back, Spain remained calm and continued to probe for an opening, completing 1,006 passes, taking 23 shots to Russia's seven and finishing with a whopping 79 per cent of possession. Somehow, in spite of all their efforts, a second opening could not be engineered. Penalties would be needed to settle the tie.

Perhaps flustered by their inability to kill off a side they had toyed with for 120 minutes, Spain fluffed their lines as man of the match Igor Akinfeev, who'd made a series of vital stops during open play, saved two spot kicks to help seal a famous victory for Russia and send Fernando Hierro (appointed just two days before Spain's opening fixture after the dismissal of Julen Lopetegui) and his players home.

Drama on the Don

The Round of 16 was delivering its fair share of surprises, and while it also offered up a routine 2-0 win for Brazil against a spirited Mexico, a dire encounter between Sweden and Switzerland that the former just about deserved to win 1-0, and a tight match that saw Croatia beat Denmark on penalties, it wasn't finished with the drama yet.

When Belgium clinched top spot in Group G with three wins from three to set up a tie against Japan, even the most die-hard Blue Samurai fans expected the Europeans to run out easy winners. It therefore came as quite the shock to see the 2011 Asian Cup winners race into a two-goal lead early in the second half. The Round of 16 was sharpening its knives for another leading nation harbouring hopes of going all the way in Russia – unless the likes of Kevin De Bruyne, Eden Hazard or Romelu Lukaku could stage a comeback of course.

Remarkably given the talent in the Belgian ranks, it was in fact Jan Vertonghen who would begin a Red Devils fightback, the Spurs centre-back redeeming his error that led to Japan's opener with a looping angled header to give Belgium hope. Five minutes later and they would be level, substitute Marouane Fellaini nodding home. Then, with extra time just seconds away, Nacer Chadli stroked home to finish a flowing counter-attack and break Japanese hearts.

One night in Moscow

England versus Colombia rounded off the last 16 in Russia, and it wasn't to be outdone when it came to theatre.

After suffering defeat to Japan, Colombia had beaten both Senegal and Poland to top Group H and were now aiming to reach the quarter-finals for the second successive time. England, meanwhile, retained hopes of adding their name into the last eight for the first time since 2006.

A relatively cagey affair finally burst into life on 57 minutes when Harry Kane was hauled down inside the Colombia area as the South Americans nervously awaited an England corner, the Three Lions' prowess from set-pieces in the group stage unsettling

their opponents. The Spurs striker duly rifled England ahead, where they remained until the 93rd minute.

Boasting two goals already, Yerry Mina once again rose to the occasion when his nation needed him most, the Barcelona defender meeting a corner with a thumping downward header that bounced up off the turf and over the head of Kieran Trippier guarding the far post. A devastated England faced extra time.

Both sides exchanged opportunities during the additional 30 minutes, but neither possessed the composure to seize one, Danny Rose going closest with an angled effort that whistled narrowly beyond David Ospina's post. And so it would come down to penalties, nemesis of so many England teams.

It felt like history was repeating itself when, with the score at 3-2 to Colombia, Jordan Henderson saw his effort parried away by Ospina. Yet again England had missed in a shootout. Yet again they appeared destined to lose a tense knockout tie in the cruellest of ways. And then, to English relief, Colombia missed their fourth spot kick, handing England a chance to draw level, which they promptly did thanks to a hard and high drive from Trippier that left Ospina clutching thin air. 3-3. Sudden death.

Carlos Bacca placed the ball on the spot, took a few strides back and stood, legs apart, steadying his nerves. His shot was powerful and straight down the middle of Pickford's goal, who was flinging himself to his right. But just when it seemed like the net would bulge, the Everton keeper threw up his left hand to palm the ball away. Advantage England, but could Eric Dier grab his opportunity to make history? He most certainly could, smashing his penalty to Ospina's right. As he raced away to join the throng of red shirts piling onto Pickford, Gareth Southgate roared at the heavens, the ghosts of his own penalty heartache exorcised after 22 long years. England had won a World Cup penalty shoot-out for the first time.

Waistcoats at the ready

In the wake of such an eventful set of fixtures, the Quarter-Finals were always going to be hard-pressed to match the drama of the Round of 16. Even England, supported by now by hordes of waistcoat-wearing fans back home (a nod to Southgate's touchline attire), managed to avoid the usual highs and lows of a nail-biting last-eight match, brushing Sweden aside 2-0 with little fanfare to reach a first World Cup semi-final since Italia '90.

Joining them in the last four were Belgium (2-1 victors over Brazil), France (who had beaten a lacklustre Uruguay 2-0 in their characteristically casual way) and Croatia, the latter of which had required penalties to edge out hosts Russia after a thrilling 2-2 draw. They would now play England for a place in the Final.

As with the supporters of the other semi-finalists, England fans were daring to dream, and their hopes of a first major trophy since 1966 surged when Trippier found the back of Danijel Subašic's net with a perfectly placed free-kick just five minutes into the match. Shellshocked, Croatia tried in vain to rally, but the pace and movement of Raheem Sterling and Harry Kane kept them from fashioning their own openings, and England should have scored a second, Kane spurning a glorious chance with only Subašic to beat. Even so, Southgate's men still held the advantage. A chance to face France (who had beaten Belgium 1-0 the night before) in the final in Moscow was in English hands.



June 27, 2018, Kazan. Dejected German players contemplate their stunning group-stage exit in the wake of defeat to South Korea.



July 15, 2018, Moscow. Hugo Lloris holds the World Cup trophy aloft as France hail their victory in a shower of rain and confetti.

Running out of time, Croatia worked the ball wide, where Šime Vrsaljko took a touch before whipping a cross into the England box. Electing to clear the danger with a diving header, Kyle Walker stooped to meet the ball, only to be beaten to it by the outstretched boot of Ivan Perišic, who stabbed home to pull Croatia level. The familiar prospect of extra time beckoned both sides.

Croatia apparently didn't fancy having to settle a third game on the bounce from 12 yards, and with little over ten minutes remaining, Mario Mandžukic ghosted in behind a complacent Walker to crash home the winner. Football wasn't coming home after all, but Southgate's England could leave Russia knowing they'd made their country proud.

Didier does it again

Competing in their third World Cup Final, France boasted two of the tournament's top scorers in Griezmann and Mbappé (both on four goals), a midfield ably orchestrated by N'Golo Kanté and Blaise Matuidi and a back line featuring the formidable pairing of Raphaël Varane and Samuel Umtiti. And yet, despite their tournament pedigree and strength in depth, the feeling that Didier Deschamps' side were yet to hit top gear pervaded.

For their part, Croatia were contesting their first major final, and Zlatko Dalic's outfit had fought like lions to get there. They knew they could give their favoured opponents a game.

Fittingly for a World Cup that had offered up several goal-fests, the Final witnessed six goals. The chaos began on 18 minutes when an unfortunate Mandžukic nodded a Griezmann free-kick into his own net. But Croatia weren't behind for long, Perišic doing well to create space in a packed area and rifle an equaliser beyond Lloris.

An even contest broke out for the next ten minutes as the game settled down. Then, on 38 minutes, France won a corner, which Griezmann fizzed into Subašic's area. Rushing to snuff out the danger, Perišic appeared to clear the ball legally, but VAR suggested he had in fact used his hand to usher the ball out of touch. Ignoring a tirade of Croatian appeals, referee Néstor Pitana blew for a penalty. For the third time in seven games, Griezmann slotted home to put France ahead.

Croatia battled valiantly, the underdogs snapping at French heels at every turn, but their resistance folded just shy of the hour mark when Paul Pogba reacted quickest to a rebound to curl the ball beyond Subašic and put France at 3-1. Minutes later, Kylian Mbappé made history when scoring France's fourth, his low, long-range effort making him just the second teenager (Pelé being the first) to find the net in a World Cup final.

Few would have blamed Croatia for letting their heads drop, but instead they continued to pressure and harry, and while the outcome remained unchanged, they earned a small consolation when Mandžukic robbed a dawdling Lloris to make it 4-2. In the end though, France possessed too much for all comers. For a second time in 20 years, the World Cup was theirs.

Apparently conscious of the theatre unfolding inside the Luzhniki Stadium, the sky over Moscow opened as Deschamps and his players celebrated. Worthy champions – if rarely spectacular – France more than played their part in ensuring that a World Cup filled with stunning strikes, unexpected results and historic milestones culminated in the highest-scoring Final in over half a century. Even more importantly, despite the understandable fears of many, Russia had given the world a party to remember.



QATAR 2022

FOOTBALL'S FIRST WINTER WORLD CUP WOULD BEAR WITNESS TO STUNNING UPSETS, UNFORGETTABLE GOALS AND THE CROWNING OF A NEW KING

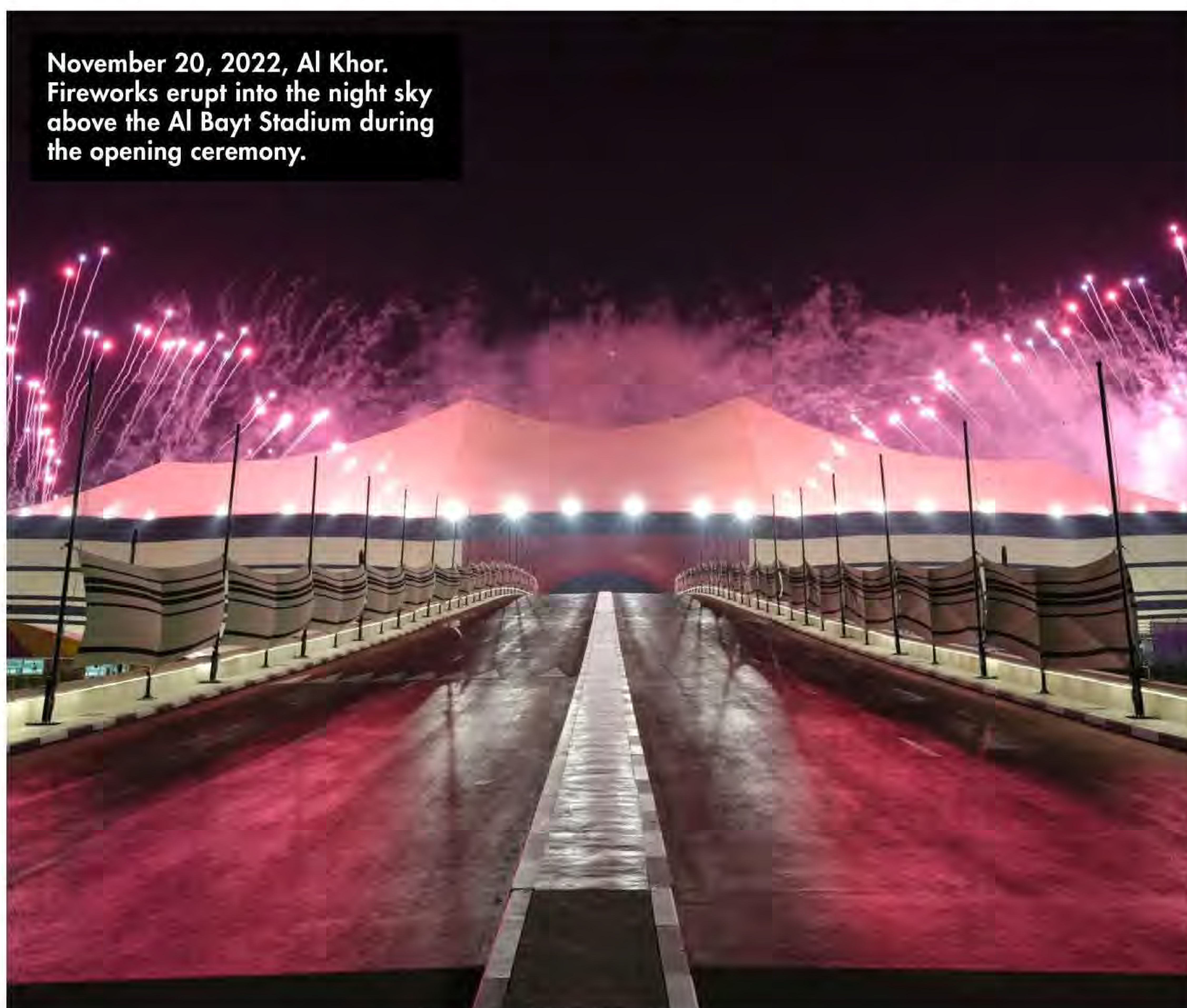
By rights it should never have happened, let alone been staged so seamlessly. Yet there is no contesting the fact that the 2022 World Cup in Qatar is now consigned to the annals of footballing history. It happened, and it was a breathtaking success. Somehow, a desert state the size of Wales with a population of less than three million pulled off the ultimate sporting test while temporarily assuring its captivated global audience that by doing so, Qatar was proving what a progressive place it really is.

However, there comes a time when you must put the politics aside for a moment and acknowledge what a spectacle this controversial nation provided, albeit on the backs of hard-working migrants. From the travails of the Qatari national side to arguably the most entertaining Final in World Cup history, 2022 trumped its Russian predecessor and laid down quite the marker for 2026.

Desert dreams

Thanks in no small part to the seeding system used for World Cup draws keeping the 'big' names largely apart in the group stages, combined with the host nation naturally opening proceedings, the first game at football's biggest tournament rarely boasts the most talented players. With all due respect to both nations, Qatar versus Ecuador was nobody's idea of an unmissable curtain-raiser, even if the opening ceremony featured Hollywood icon Morgan Freeman. Unfortunately for the local fans inside the Al Bayt Stadium, their excitement ended there, an Enner Valencia brace condemning Félix Sánchez Bas (who is now the Ecuador manager) and his side to becoming the first hosts to lose their opening game.

With Senegal and the Netherlands also pitted against Qatar, Group A offered little in the way of surprises. Reprising his role in the Dutch dugout for the third time, Louis van Gaal led his side to routine 2-0 wins over Senegal and Qatar either side of a 1-1 draw with Ecuador to top the table. In a tense winner-takes-all match between Senegal and the South Americans, the African champions triumphed 2-1. For their part, Qatar had already been sent (on a very brief journey) home by a second successive loss, Senegal running out 3-1 winners in Doha. Fortunately for the watching millions around the globe, the group stages had already thrown up a multitude of shocks long before Group A drew to its anticipated conclusion.



November 20, 2022, Al Khor. Fireworks erupt into the night sky above the Al Bayt Stadium during the opening ceremony.

© Getty Images, Alamy

Historically, England has a chequered legacy when it comes to starting a World Cup campaign, but whether they win (as they did on five occasions between 1966 and 2018) or lose (just twice during that same period), the Three Lions never make it easy for their loyal fans. Thus, the country was pleasantly surprised to find Gareth Southgate's men in a ruthless mood on the afternoon of 21 November.

Facing a stubborn if unspectacular Iran inside the impressive Khalifa International Stadium, England probed for 35 minutes before Jude Bellingham broke the deadlock. Smelling blood, the Three Lions ripped their group rivals to pieces in a 6-2 mauling to begin their bid for glory in rampant style. However, the result of the round was yet to come.

Soaring Eagles

Afforded less than a nine per cent chance of victory by data company Gracenote, the Desert Eagles of Saudi Arabia faced a daunting start to their campaign in the form of Argentina. Their prospects only worsened when Lionel Messi thumped home a tenth-minute penalty, and at the interval most discussions centred around how many more goals the 1986 winners might pillage. None, as it would turn out.

Fired up by coach Hervé Renard's passionate half-time speech ("Don't you feel something? Don't you feel we are able to come back? Come on guys, this is a World Cup. Give everything!"), the green-clad underdogs levelled on 48 minutes through Saleh Al-



November 22, 2022, Lusail. Saudi Arabia's players celebrate taking a shock lead against eventual champions Argentina on a historic afternoon for Hervé Renard's side.

Shehri's low drive. Stunned into semi-paralysis, the Argentine defence was statuesque five minutes later when Salem Al-Dawsari trapped a high ball inside Emi Martinez's box, skipped inside Angel Di María, sidestepped Leandro Paredes and bent a shot into the far corner of the net to spark bedlam on the Saudi bench and seal a monumental win.

Pillars of sand

The group stages continued to treat fans to some unbelievable scorelines, including Japan beating Germany and Spain 2-1 apiece, Morocco swatting a poor Belgium aside 2-0 and South Korea bouncing back from losing 3-2 to Ghana to beat Portugal and snag second spot in Group H at the expense of the Black Stars and a curiously lacklustre Uruguay.

Bizarrely, in spite of the welcome unpredictability, the majority of the groups concluded as expected. After toiling to a goalless draw against the USA, England rediscovered their cutting edge in time to defeat neighbours Wales 3-0 in Al Rayyan to put an end to the Dragons' first World Cup showing since 1958. They would be followed into the next round by the Americans, who edged out Iran 1-0. Elsewhere, Argentina recovered by bagging consecutive 2-0 wins over Mexico and Poland to win Group C.

Reigning champions France avoided any threat of an early elimination by battering Australia 4-1 and then pushing pre-tournament dark horses Denmark to the brink with a 2-1 win in Doha thanks to a Kylian Mbappé double. Les Bleus' subsequent defeat to Tunisia therefore raised many an eyebrow, but few French heart rates.

Seeing the likes of Spain, Brazil, Switzerland, Croatia and Portugal reaching the knockout stages surprised no one, but the absence of a few famous names certainly did. When it comes to winning World Cup games, only five-time champions Brazil boast a better record than Germany, the Europeans having won 67 of their 109 matches at the tournament prior to Qatar 2022. Banking on their pedigree and hoping to brush off their 2018 group-stage elimination as nothing more than an aberration, Germany were confident of escaping a group that included Costa Rica, Japan and Spain. However, history is no help when it comes to facing determined opponents longing to claim a famous scalp, which is precisely what the Blue Samurais did, fighting back to shock the 2014 winners 2-1. Four points from their remaining two games were not enough to save Die Mannschaft, who once again limped home after falling at the first hurdle.

Beating Germany to the departures lounge was Belgium, another big hitter forced to confront the demise of a 'golden generation'. Displaying all of the virtues that the Red Devils lacked, Morocco deservedly topped the group on seven points, two ahead of Croatia. Compact, disciplined and equipped with several skilful attackers, the Africans' esprit de corps drew many admirers, but little could they have known just how far it would take them.



December 9, 2022, Al Rayyan. Dani Alves comforts a distraught Neymar moments after Brazil's quarter-final defeat to Croatia.

BEATING GERMANY TO THE DEPARTURES LOUNGE WAS BELGIUM, ANOTHER BIG HITTER CONFRONTING THE DEMISE OF A 'GOLDEN GENERATION'

Lions on the prowl

If the early rounds in Qatar had enabled the likes of Australia, the USA, Senegal and Japan to dream, the Round of 16 would prove to be a nightmare for several daring upstarts.

First on the chopping block were the USA, who were outplayed by an efficient Dutch team in a 3-1 defeat in which Memphis Depay's well-worked early strike was the pick of the goals.

Could Australia go one better by ambushing Argentina in the Ahmad bin Ali Stadium and reach the Quarter-Finals for the first time? From the perspective of Graham Arnold and the Socceroos faithful, sadly not, although they did manage to push La Albiceleste all the way in a narrow 2-1 loss.

France and England suffered no such discomfort, Didier Deschamps' formidable charges blitzing Poland 3-1 on a night dominated by an unstoppable Mbappé before England beat Senegal 3-0 in front of 66,000 fans to set up a mouthwatering Quarter-Final.

Croatia echoed their achievements in Russia by besting Japan from 12 yards in Al-Wakrah to reach the Quarter-Finals. Brazil found things far easier, hammering South Korea 4-1 on a night of slick interplay and samba celebrations.

Portugal found their groove to go two better than their linguistic cousins, a rapacious Gonçalo Ramos firing home a superb hat-trick in a 6-1 evisceration of Switzerland. However,



December 9, 2022, Lusail. Argentina's players make a point of revelling in their penalty shootout win over Netherlands after a feisty game.

arguably the most enthralling encounter of the round was a goalless draw played out just hours before Switzerland's collapse in Lusail.

Competing in the knockout stages of a World Cup for the first time since 1986, Morocco's reward for their eye-catching form was a tough tie against 2010 winners Spain. Wisely ceding possession (68 per cent of it), Morocco sat deep and looked to hit on the counter, mustering six shots, three of which were on target. A profligate Spain only managed to direct one of their 13 efforts at Yassine Bounou's goal. Unable to breach the Atlas Lions' tight defence, Spain passed their way to a second successive Round of 16 shootout.

Whether they were haunted by the ghosts of Russia 2018 or simply frustrated, La Roja lost their composure when they needed it most as Bounou saved two penalties to help Walid Regragui's team win the shootout.

Sorrow for the Seleção

Touching down in Qatar on the back of a 15-game unbeaten streak, Tite's Brazil were in formidable form and hellbent on winning a first World Cup in 20 years. Most backed Neymar and co to continue their march towards the Final by dispatching Croatia in the Quarter-Finals, but if they expected the chequered ones to accommodate their opponents then they were sorely mistaken. In fact, it would take Brazil until stoppage time at the end of the first period of extra time to finally break Croatia's resistance.

Receiving the ball 30 yards from goal, Neymar played a one-two first with Rodrygo and then Lucas Paquetá, shimmied into the box and steered an angled shot into the roof of the net. It felt like a telling moment, a cathartic release for Brazil's top scorer and the swathes of yellow-and-green supporters in the stands. But Croatia don't read scripts – under Zlatko Dalic they never know when they're beaten.

On 117 minutes, Bruno Petkovic guided home an equaliser via a deflection to floor Tite's men. The lottery of spot kicks loomed, and once again Croatia showed their mettle, finding the net with all four of their penalties. Brazil saw their first effort saved by Dominik Livakovic (who had denied Japan three times from 12 yards) and their crucial fourth clatter off the post as they slipped to a 4-2 loss. Neymar was left sobbing into his shirt.

The Battle of Lusail

"Football is something like war. Whoever behaves too properly is lost." So said Rinus Michels, the pioneering Dutch manager who revolutionised the European game in the 1970s through his total football tactics. It is a maxim that both the Netherlands and Argentina were only too willing to embody in a ferociously contested Quarter-Final on 9 December.

Argentina struck first on 35 minutes when Nahuel Molina latched onto a brilliantly disguised Messi pass on the edge of the box before prodding the ball past Andries Noppert. Denzel Dumfries compounded his side's situation on 70 minutes by felling Marcos Acuña inside the box to hand Messi the chance to double Argentina's lead, which he promptly did. In a game that had already

seen tempers flaring on both sides and a rash of yellow cards, Messi elected to fan the flames further by celebrating in front of the Dutch bench.

An increasingly ill-tempered match was temporarily paused to allow for the removal of a pitch invader, and even when play resumed it was regularly halted to allow referee Antonio Lahoz to issue another caution.

Desperate to find a way back into the game, van Gaal sent Wout Weghorst into the fray. The substitution paid off five minutes later when the Burnley striker headed a Steven Berghuis cross into the net to give the Dutch hope. Leandro Paredes vented his frustrations by chopping down Nathan Aké and then slamming the ball at the nearby Dutch bench. Enraged, Virgil van Dijk sent the Juventus midfielder sprawling to spark a brawl that resulted in a flurry of cards. Even Lionel Scaloni, the Argentina manager, found himself in Lahoz's notebook.

This lengthy spell of hostilities resulted in ten minutes of added time, long enough for Weghorst to receive Teun Koopmeiners' clever pass from a free kick just outside the Argentine box, turn a flailing Enzo Fernández and guide a low shot into the net as the clock ticked into the 101st minute to trigger Oranje hysteria.

An additional 30 minutes of cagey football failed to find a winner, meaning a repeat of the 2014 Semi-Final shootout. Unfortunately for the Dutch, the end result would be the same, Argentina once more displaying their customary steel to win 4-3. Yet that wasn't the end of the action.

In a game that witnessed a record 18 yellow cards and one red, a distraught Dumfries managed to get himself sent off for dissent after the final whistle.

History-makers

In 1977, three-time World Cup winner Pelé predicted that before the end of the millennium, a team hailing from the world's second-largest continent would prevail at the tournament. Hindsight may have shown that confident statement to be wide of the mark, but the late legend (who passed away 11 days after the Final in Qatar) must have been delighted to see a major milestone reached by an African side.

Tipped to crash out in the first round, Morocco had vanquished two major European nations en route to a first Quarter-Final in the country's history. If they were to extend their stay in Qatar, they would have to do so again on 10 December against a much-fancied Portugal.

Relishing their underdogs tag, Morocco took the game to their opponents, which created chances at both ends, Bounou called upon to deny João Félix's early diving header with a superb save. However, it would be Morocco who would make the breakthrough, Youssef En-Nesyri beating a flapping Diogo Costa to thump home a downward header from Yahya Attiat-Allah's cross.

THIS TIME, KANE'S CUSTOMARY PRECISION ELUDED HIM, AND ENGLAND'S CAPTAIN SENT HIS EFFORT INTO ORBIT AND FRANCE INTO ANOTHER SEMI-FINAL

A series of Portuguese efforts to restore parity followed, Bruno Fernandes going closest with an audacious volley that smacked the crossbar. Even the introduction of Cristiano Ronaldo (the estranged Man Utd forward levelling the all-time record for international appearances in the men's game) couldn't salvage the situation, and when Félix saw a late effort tipped over by Bounou, the feeling that it wouldn't be Portugal's day was inescapable. So it proved as the Atlas Lions saw the match out (despite Walid Cheddira's dismissal) to become the first African side to reach a World Cup Semi-Final.

France awaited them in the next round, much to English regret. An even contest in Al Khor burst into life on 17 minutes when Aurélien Tchouaméni's speculative long-range effort evaded Jordan Pickford's late dive to put Les Blues ahead.

Undeterred, England created a raft of opportunities as they began to dominate midfield, only a smart Hugo Lloris save preventing Harry Kane from scoring. The French skipper then denied a Bellingham volley to preserve his side's lead, but he was helpless to keep Kane out from the spot after Tchouaméni fouled Bukayo Saka. Spurs' all-time highest goalscorer fired England level, and with 40 minutes on the clock, momentum seemed to shift in the Three Lions' favour.

Neither Maguire heading against the post nor the evergreen Olivier Giroud crashing a header past Pickford to restore France's advantage unsettled England's rhythm, and when substitute Mason Mount drifted into the box and was bowled over by a panicked Theo Hernández, referee Wilton Sampaio blew for a spot kick and a second shot at levelling a game England probably should have been winning.

Up stepped Kane, a totem of coolness and reliability as ever. However, this time his customary precision eluded him, and England's captain sent his effort into orbit and France into another Semi-Final.

The greatest Final of them all

While the romantics no doubt hoped to see Morocco go all the way, or perhaps Croatia avenge their 4-2 reversal in the 2018 Final in Moscow, it transpired that the Semi-Finals contained no room for sentimentality.

In an uncharacteristically subdued performance, Croatia failed to contain Argentina, who sliced their back line apart on the half-hour mark to leave Dominik Livakovic with little choice but to flatten Julián Álvarez and concede a penalty, which Messi coolly dispatched. Five minutes later, the Man City forward was at it again, sprinting from inside his own half past a series of half-hearted Croatian tackles to score.



December 10, 2022, Al Khor. Harry Kane watches his second penalty sail over the crossbar, taking England's hopes of progress with it.

Messi capped a fine individual display on 69 minutes when he turned Joško Gvardiol (widely regarded as the finest defender at the tournament) inside out, slipped into the area and fed Álvarez, who drove in an unstoppable shot to wrap up a 3-0 win.

Similarly disorganised and shot-shy were Morocco. Falling behind to a close-range Hernández half-volley, Morocco conjured few clear-cut chances in a relatively uneventful tie that was put to bed by a Randal Kolo Muani tap-in ten minutes from time. Even so, there was no shame in losing to the holders, especially after beating three heavyweights en route to a historic Semi-Final finish (Morocco would lose 2-1 to Croatia in the third-place playoff to come fourth overall).

Argentina and France would go head to head on 18 December to decide the destination of the ultimate prize. The Lusail Stadium pulsated with anticipation prior to kick-off, but nobody inside the crowd of nearly 89,000 spectators could possibly have predicted what was about to unfold.

20 minutes of wary probing suddenly gave way to a breathless encounter triggered by a slaloming run from Angel Di María. Poised on the left wing, the Juventus forward bamboozled Ousmane Dembélé, who resorted to giving Di María a gentle shove as he shaped to pass inside the French box. As he had done on three occasions already, Messi blasted the ball into the net from the ensuing spot kick. Advantage Argentina, and just 13 minutes later they would double it courtesy of a flowing move that ended with Di María sweeping an exquisite pass from Alexis Mac Allister over Hugo Lloris.



December 18, 2022, Lusail. Sitting on the shoulders of Sergio Agüero, Lionel Messi hoists the World Cup trophy aloft.

Shellshocked, France offered little going forwards, and with just ten minutes of normal time remaining they seemed destined to surrender their crown with a whimper. When a harmless looping ball dropped to the feet of Nicolás Otamendi 25 yards from goal, it looked like another French build-up was set to come to nothing. Giving chase, substitute Kolo Muani harried the defender, who lost control and his man, bringing the electric winger tumbling to the turf. France finally had a lifeline, and Kylian Mbappé wasn't about to waste it, his well-placed penalty pegging Argentina back. Surely Deschamps' charges were out of time? Au contraire.

Ever the player for the biggest of occasions, a minute later Mbappé hauled France level with an outrageous volley that left Martinez clutching at thin air. Refusing to fold, Argentina almost won it in normal time, then thought they'd done so in extra time when Lloris parried Lautaro Martínez's shot as far as Messi, who scrambled home the rebound from two yards out to make it 3-2. Still, France were not ready to admit defeat.

Shaping to bend a shot across goal as full time loomed, Mbappé saw his fierce effort clatter off Gonzalo Montiel's elbow. For the second time that evening, referee Szymon Marciniak pointed to the spot, and for the second time Mbappé scored. In doing so he joined Geoff Hurst in an exclusive club as the only men to score a World Cup Final hat-trick. There was still time for France to almost nick it at the death, a hopeful punt forward from Ibrahima Konaté falling kindly for Kolo Muani. Many a prayer was whispered in Buenos Aires in honour of Martinez's outstretched left foot, which proved enough of an obstacle to Muani's shot to send the match to penalties.

Highlighting their superhuman ability to handle the most intense pressure, both Mbappé and Messi scored to make it 1-1 in the shootout. Martinez continued his heroics by pushing Kingsley Coman's effort out to safety, allowing Paulo Dybala to edge Argentina ahead. When Tchouaméni sent his shot wide of the post, Lionel Scaloni's men sensed victory, which was firmly in their hands even as Kolo Muani slotted home to make it 3-2. The crucial kick fell to Montiel, and with Messi and the rest of the Argentine team watching on from the halfway line, he calmly sent the ball into the corner of Lloris's net and a nation of 46 million into dreamland.

Finally, at the fifth time of asking, the greatest player of the modern era was a World Cup winner. No longer standing in the shadow of the late Maradona, Messi basked in the light of a triumph that could never have been achieved without him. It wasn't just his goals (seven, in a World Cup that featured 172, the most at a single tournament) and assists (three) that had carried La Albiceleste all the way; it was his aura, drive and sheer will to win. Master of all he surveyed, Messi (cajoled into wearing a black-and-gold cloak known as a bisht when lifting the trophy) was carried from the field on the shoulders of his former teammate Sergio Agüero as the world of football gazed adoringly upon its new king. In the hearts and minds of every fan of the game, his reign will last forever.





AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND

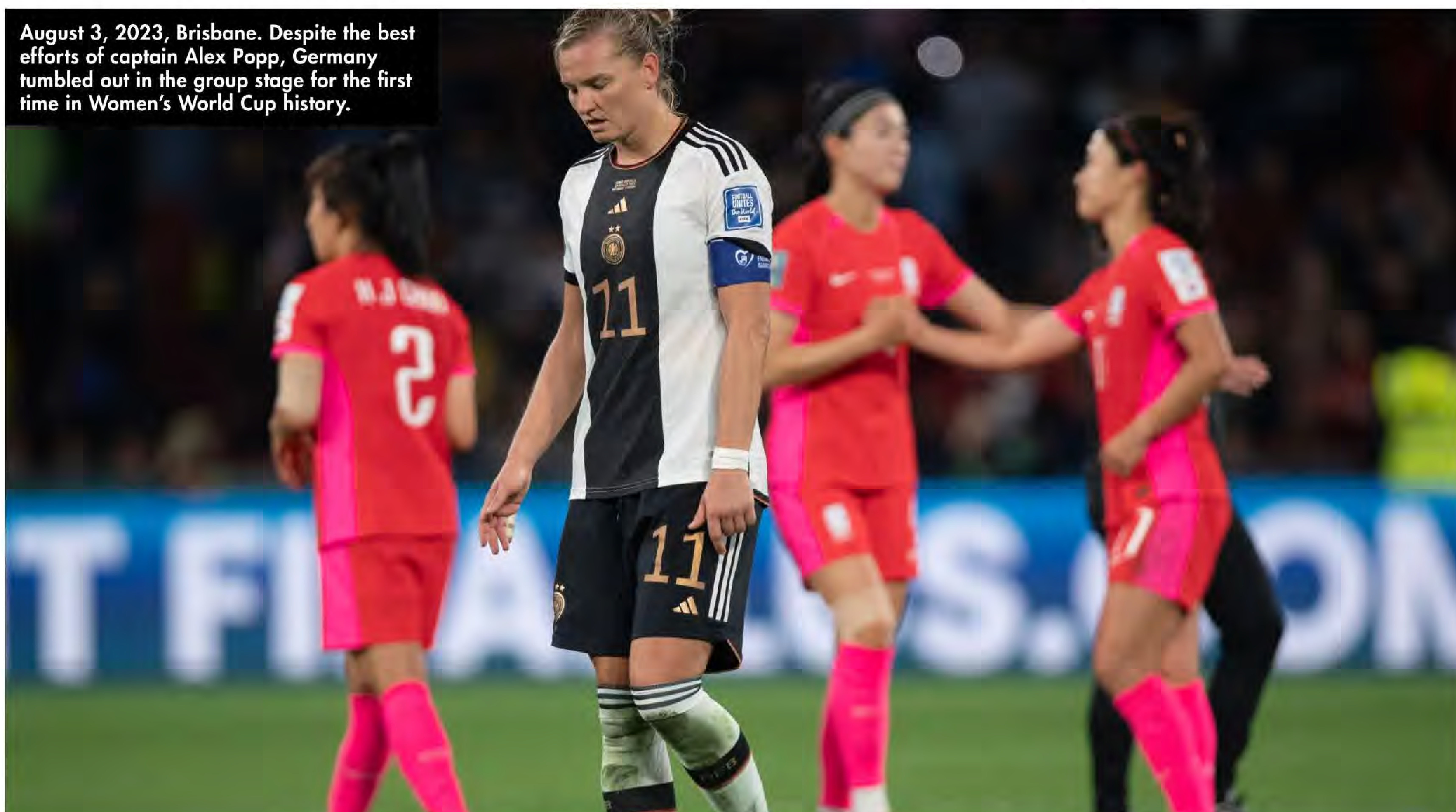
THE SUMMER OF 2023 SAW THE MOST ATTENDED AND MOST WATCHED WOMEN'S WORLD CUP TO DATE, WITH SPAIN THE EVENTUAL VICTORS. EXPLORE THE STORIES AND THEMES FROM THE TOURNAMENT

2023 was the first Women's World Cup to be hosted by two nations. Australia and New Zealand divided duties, with both countries at very different stages of their women's football journeys. Australia – or the Matildas, as the team are known – have a strong selection of star players in their prime. Sam Kerr is one of the billboard players for women's football globally; in Australia, she is the undisputed face of the sport.

Going into this World Cup, Kerr was approaching 30, the age of fellow attacker, Emily van Egmond. Matildas vice-captain Steph Catley and goalkeeper Mackenzie Arnold were 29, while fellow mainstays Caitlin Foord, Hayley Raso and Alanna Kennedy were 28. The Matildas have a familiar and recognisable core that have played together since their teenage years, and are jet-powered by a world-famous face in Kerr. Her injury at the outset of the tournament threatened to rob her of a picturebook moment at the World Cup, but her long-range equaliser in the Semi-Final against England saw those fears allayed.

The situation is slightly different for New Zealand, who do not boast a star player to adorn the walls of young girls and boys. Their global remoteness compared to football's power centres also means that the Football Ferns, as they are known, rarely play games at home. They usually travel, so it has been more difficult for women's football to take hold in New Zealand. They are regular qualifiers for the World Cup, but going into this tournament, they had yet to win a World Cup game.

Few expected New Zealand to get through their group, even with home advantage and the boon of being a first seed – a privilege afforded to the hosts (they would have been third seeds, ordinarily). They set the tone for the group stages by opening the tournament with a shock 1-0 win over Norway. They celebrated their first World Cup win, and rightly so, but the fact that they didn't manage to get through the group after beating the most difficult opposition on matchday one felt like a disappointment.



August 3, 2023, Brisbane. Despite the best efforts of captain Alex Popp, Germany tumbled out in the group stage for the first time in Women's World Cup history.





AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND

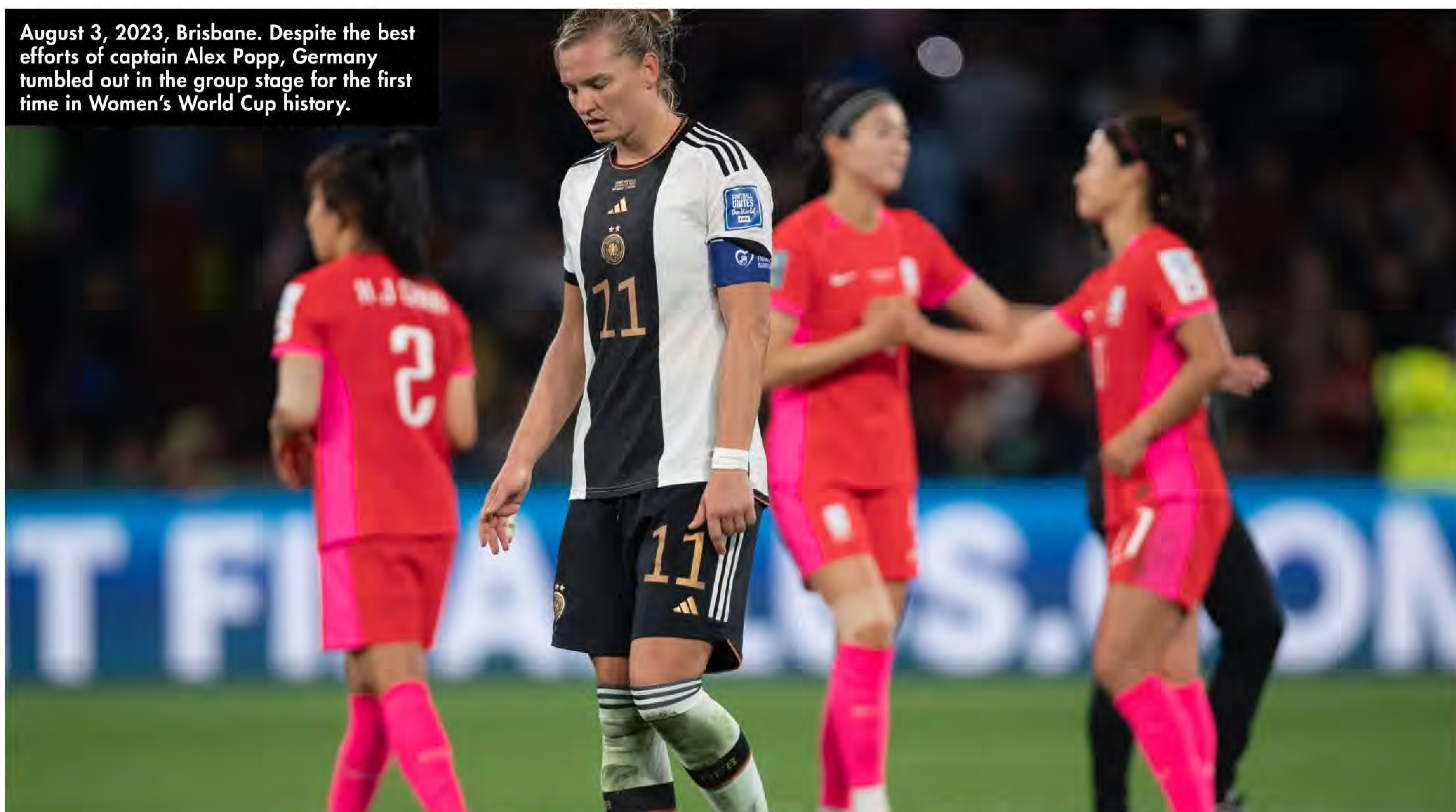
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August 3, 2023, Brisbane. Despite the best efforts of captain Alex Popp, Germany tumbled out in the group stage for the first time in Women's World Cup history.



August 16, 2023, Sydney. After recovering from a calf injury, Sam Kerr celebrates her goal against England in the Semi-Final.

Ultimately, it is difficult to pinpoint whether the tournament has created a legacy for women's football in New Zealand. The country has invested in women's sport, with the Women's Rugby World Cup – which New Zealand won – and the Women's Cricket World Cup taking place there in 2022. Winning the Women's Rugby World Cup in what is largely a rugby country anyway will have done wonders for women's rugby in New Zealand, though it remains to be seen what the Women's World Cup and a group stage exit for the Ferns does for women's football.

As for Australia, the Matildas broke all manner of attendance and television viewing records en route to the Semi-Finals – an Aussie Rules game at the MCG (Melbourne Cricket Ground) was delayed until the conclusion of the Matildas' Quarter-Final penalty shootout with France. While the popularity of the team boomed during the tournament, the vast majority of the squad play in Europe and the US, so it is difficult to see the sort of bounce in women's club attendances Down Under that we saw in England after the Euros.

The cup of upsets

One of the strongest themes to emerge from this World Cup was a sense that the 'middleweights' are closing the gap to the global 'heavyweights'. South Africa, Morocco, Colombia and Jamaica all made it to the knockout rounds, while Nigeria finished ahead of current Olympic champions Canada and defeated hosts Australia to qualify from their group. Meanwhile, Brazil and Germany joined Canada in the departures lounge at the conclusion of the group stages. USA were the width of a post away from exiting at the same stage, with Portugal hitting the woodwork in stoppage time as the teams played out a 0-0 draw in their final group game.

These sorts of upsets are historically rare in women's football, where player pools are smaller and the level of investment in the sport varies wildly from federation to federation. One of the defining debates of the 2019 World Cup emerged after USA thumped Thailand 13-0 and some people felt the American players celebrated the latter goals with too much gusto. In this tournament, we did not see similar scorelines.

The feeling coming into the tournament was one of unpredictability, and some chaos, too. There did not seem to be a standout favourite, rather a collection of six or seven teams with the talent to win the World Cup, but all of them seemed to have some fatal flaws that would need to be worked on during the tournament. So it turned out, as finalists England and Spain made several drastic changes to their teams while proceedings commenced. This also translated into some of the bigger nations suffering bloodied noses in a manner rarely seen at the tournament.

Germany beat Morocco 6-0 in the first game of Group H, but Morocco subsequently qualified ahead of Germany from the group because the Germans lost to Colombia and could only draw with South Korea. Eventual winners Spain were thrashed 4-0 by Japan in their final group game. Nigeria have a solid history in women's football, but not so much that you would have expected them to give England the trouble they did in the Round of 16. In the end, 10-player England were grateful to hold on for penalties and win the game on spot kicks.

There is a sense of increasing professionalism and competence in that 'middle tier' of nations. Jamaica built on a strong defensive foundation, conceding only one goal during the tournament. Colombia were propelled by the nascent talent of 18-year-old Linda Caicedo, surely the finest teenage player in women's football, while Nigeria made a big impression even with their star player, Barcelona's Asisat Oshoala, struggling with injury.

Yet women's football is full of paradoxes, and there are contradictions scattered among these surprises, because in many cases the respective federations can take little to no credit for the performances of the players. Jamaica's team posted donation links on social media so they could fly to the tournament, and had their pre-tournament training camp funded by singer Cedella Marley. There was talk of Nigeria boycotting their opening game against Canada because the players had not been paid money owed by the NFF – a dispute FIFPRO had to wade into after their exit from the tournament. (Canada also found themselves in a bitter financial dispute with their federation).

Many of the players in these teams have benefitted from increased global scouting by clubs in Europe and the US, and have been able to play club football professionally. Protests and trade disputes remain commonplace in women's international football. South Africa made it to the Round of 16 ahead of Italy and Argentina, even though the players went on strike over pay and conditions for their final warm-up match before departing. The success of the 'middleweights' was a pleasing development, but as is often the case in women's football, success stories are rarely fairy tales.


August 7, 2023, Brisbane. Lauren James sees red for her stamp on a bemused Michelle Alozie of Nigeria in England's penalty shootout win over Nigeria in the Round of 16.



August 12, 2023, Sydney. Colombia wonderkid Linda Caicedo is comforted by Alex Greenwood after England's Quarter-Final win over the Colombians.

The players that shone

Spain schemer Aitana Bonmatí walked away with the Golden Ball and, following her club Barcelona's Champions League success, she was also the runaway favourite for the 2023 Ballon d'Or. When current Ballon d'Or holder Alexia Putellas ruptured her ACL on the eve of the Euros last summer, both Spain and Barcelona had to reshuffle their midfields. Bonmatí was given greater freedom and responsibility, and she has thrived on both.

In this tournament she was a blur of productivity, popping up hither and thither in the half spaces, nooks and crannies, and generally finding more pockets than a snooker table. Since returning to full fitness, Putellas has been asked to assume a super-sub brief, which is a huge compliment to Bonmatí's excellence. Spain's Salma Paralluelo was awarded the Young Player of the Tournament, but in truth, it was Colombia's 18-year-old wonderkid Caicedo who truly announced herself on the world stage.

LINDA CAICEDO'S SHUFFLE AND CURLER IN COLOMBIA'S 2-1 WIN OVER GERMANY WAS EITHER GOAL OF THE TOURNAMENT, MOMENT OR BOTH

Caicedo earned the distinction of competing in the U17, U20 and senior incarnations of the Women's World Cup inside a year, as well as winning the Player of the Tournament at the 2022 Copa America while just 17. Already well-known in women's football, Caicedo signed for Real Madrid in February 2023 as soon as she turned 18. Here, she showed why she is considered the next big talent in the women's game. Her outrageous shuffle and curler in Colombia's shock 2-1 win over Germany was either the goal of the tournament, the moment of the tournament or both.

Elsewhere, England and Manchester City centre-half Alex Greenwood was probably her country's outstanding performer. Greenwood was a career left-back converted to central defender when she was signed by Manchester City in 2020. Greenwood was unfortunate not to be a starter for the Lionesses during their Euro 2022 success, and while the centre-half partnership of Millie Bright and Leah Williamson was well established, it was a surprise to see Rachel Daly preferred to her at left-back in 2022.

With Williamson injured, Greenwood came into the centre of defence and repeated the outstanding form she had shown for City in recent seasons, both by providing excellent cover for Daly at left wing-back in this tournament and with her excellent ball progression skills with her left foot. City fans have waxed lyrical about her club form for some time – here, she finally had the opportunity to show it on the global stage.



August 20, 2023, Sydney. Golden Ball winner Aitana Bonmatí poses with the World Cup trophy and her winner's medal.

SPAIN WERE DESERVED WINNERS OVER ENGLAND, BUT THE IMMEDIATE FALLOUT OF THAT TRIUMPH GENERATED MORE HEADLINES THAN THE GAME

The winners

Jorge Vilda's Spain overcame internal strife to lift the trophy for the first time in their history. However, many neutrals felt that the victory left a bitter taste in the mouth, and it would take RFEF President Luis Rubiales a matter of moments after the final whistle to illustrate why. A forewarning came in September 2022 when 15 Spanish players withdrew from the Spanish National Team due to concerns over conditions, which they felt were not up to standard.

There had been reports of players feeling let down by the quality and intensity of training sessions, while there were also allegations of controlling behaviour from Vilda. The RFEF response was unrepentant, insisting players should apologise before being allowed to return. Some of the 15 players reluctantly returned shortly before the World Cup. Some made themselves available, but were not included. Three – Barcelona trio Mapi León, Patri Guijarro and Clàudia Pina – remained on strike and missed the tournament.

Spain started the tournament well, but when they were subjected to a counter-attacking clinic by Japan and beaten 4-0 (from just seven shots) in their final group game, few had them as tournament winners. Vilda rang the changes thereafter, even dropping goalkeeper Misa Rodríguez in favour of Cata Coll, Barcelona's second choice at number one.

The Spanish national team has often lacked a focal point in attack, an iron fist inside the velvet glove of passing and movement. Teenager Salma Paralluelo changed that, giving Spain a direct option off the bench in attack. After huge goals from the bench in the quarter and Semi-Finals, she earned a start in the Final, her pace and movement meaning that England could not step onto Spain in the way they wanted while trailing the game 1-0. With Bonmatí and Jenni Hermoso squirrelling and scheming and full-backs Ona Batlle and Olga Carmona motoring down the flanks, Spain posed many questions that their opponents could not answer.

Spain were deserved winners, besting England in the Final by a goal to nil. The immediate fallout of that triumph generated more headlines than the game, however. Firstly, it emerged that Olga Carmona – scorer of the winning goal – tragically lost her father on the day of the Final, a fact that she wasn't aware of until after the game. Meanwhile, RFEF President Luis Rubiales' lamentable post-match actions, during which he grabbed Hermoso for a

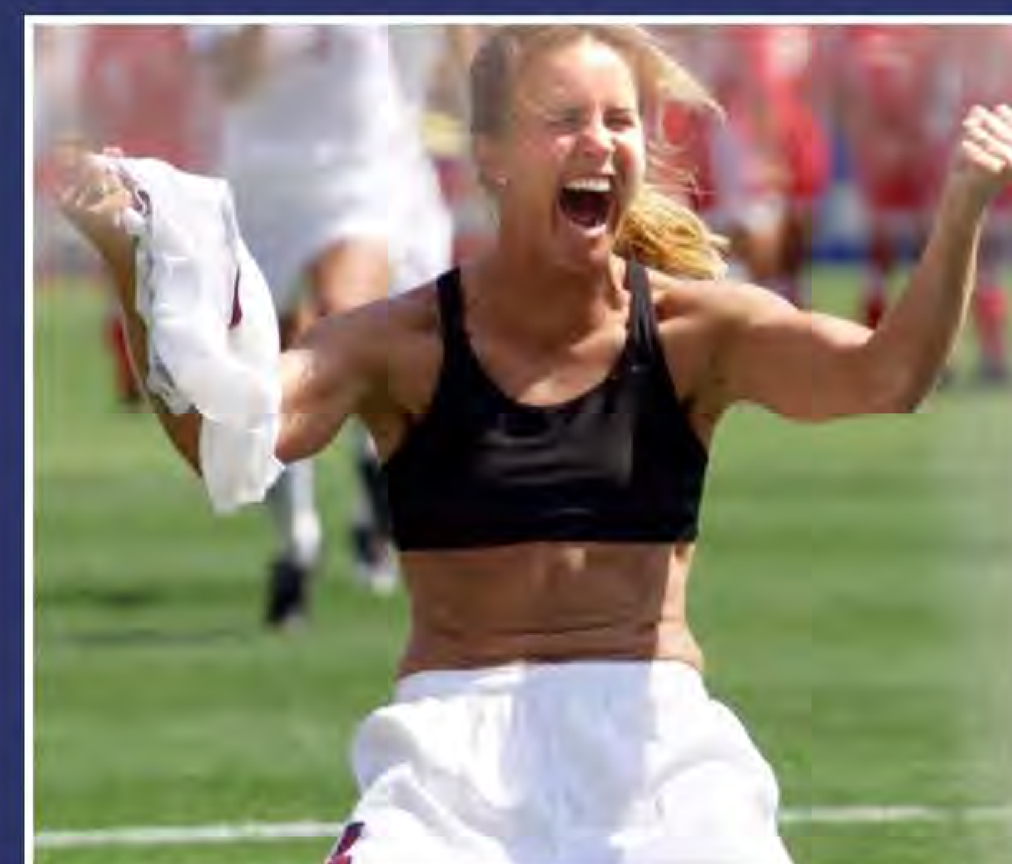
BRIEF HISTORY OF THE WOMEN'S WORLD CUP

EXPLORE THE ORIGINS AND STORY OF THE WOMEN'S WORLD CUP

Various unofficial iterations of the Women's World Cup existed before FIFA dipped their toes in the water and sanctioned a 12-team trial tournament in 1988 in China. The competition was a success, attracting big crowds, but FIFA was still nervous about the first official version in 1991. They branded it 'the World Championship for Women's Football for the M&M's Cup.' For some reason, FIFA limited the games to 80 minutes, too.

The governing body were nervous about putting their name front and centre in case it was a commercial failure. They need not have worried, as over 500,000 people attended the 1991 tournament, with a 65,000 attendance for the Final as USA beat Norway in Guangzhou. USA would go on to dominate the tournament, winning it again in iconic circumstances in 1999 at a sold-out Rose Bowl, Brandi Chastain ripping off her shirt after slotting the winning penalty against China. The US won it again in 2015 and 2019.

Norway won the 1995 World Cup, with Germany taking home the 2003 and 2007 editions and Japan beating USA in the Final in 2011. The Women's World Cup did not introduce any sort of prize money until 2007 – in stark contrast to today, where $435m was budgeted for the 2023 tournament. Winners Spain were awarded $150m – an increase on the $30m awarded for the 2019 tournament, but crucially still some way short of the $440m for the winners of the men's World Cup.



USA's Brandi Chastain becomes an instant icon as she celebrates scoring the winning penalty in the 1999 Final.

HISTORY OF THE WORLD CUP

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CANADA
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HISTORY OF THE WORLD CUP






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